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The WIZARD

DEC. '40

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A STREET & SMITH PUBLICATION

MILLION-DOLLAR MUTUEL

BY PHIL R. SHERIDAN

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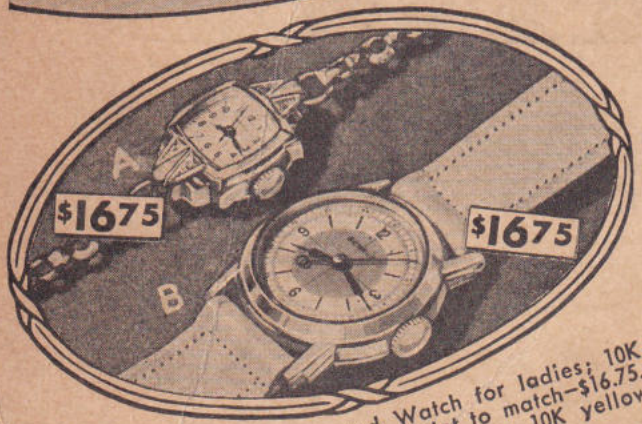

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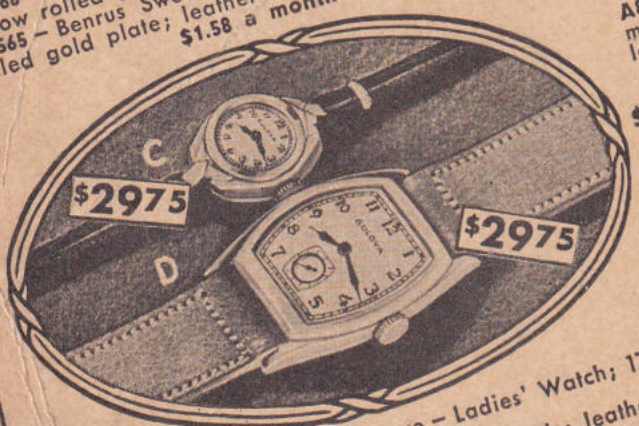

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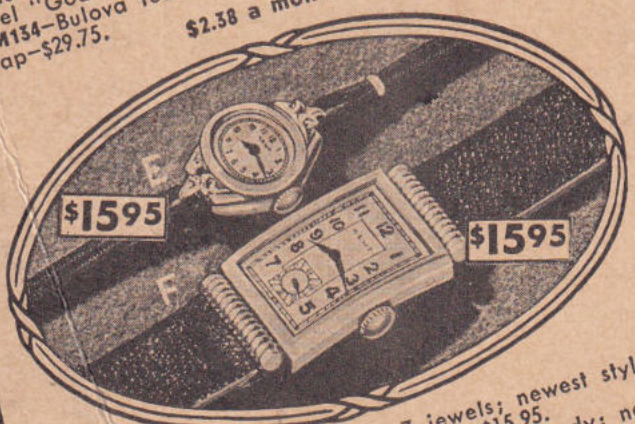

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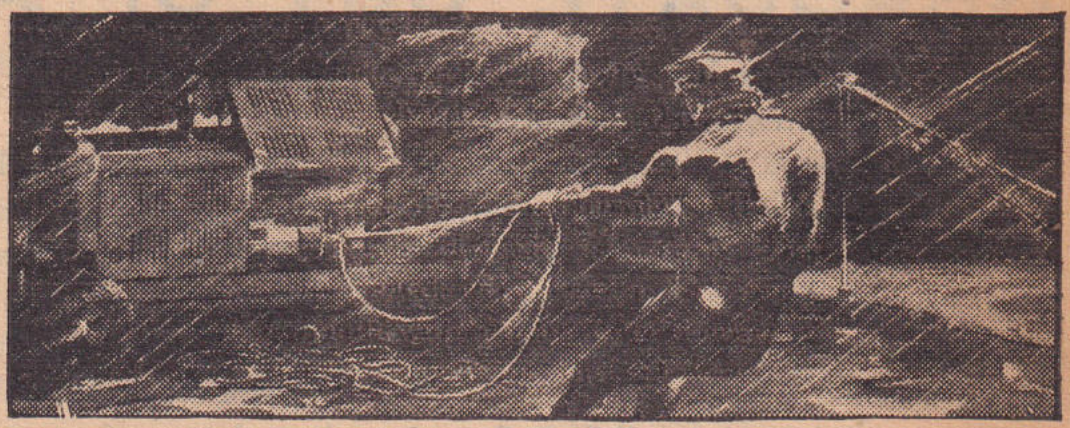

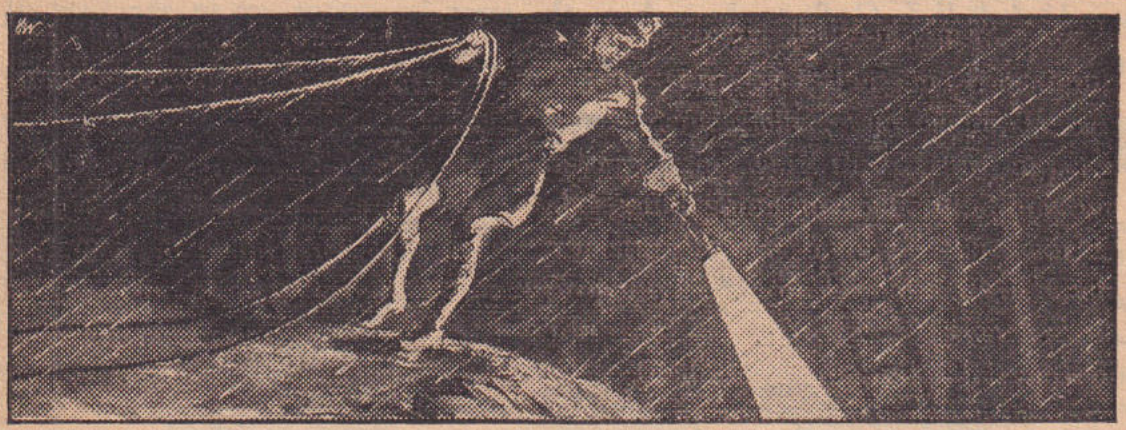

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The WIZARD

CONTENTS DECEMBER, 1940 VOL. I NO. 2

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FULL-LENGTH NOVEL

MILLION-DOLLAR MUTUEL . . . . **Phil R. Sheridan** . . . **9**

Crushing syndicates, stamping out opposition, lure Cash Gorman into a racetrack construction project for sentiment's sake, but a double-dealing social whirl and underworld gangsters keep him in to save his financial neck. The enemy holds all the aces until Jeff declares deuces wild and learns that double crossers are not adverse to knifing each other. The adventures leading to this discovery are thrilling experiences in outsmarting the top man, who is waiting to drop a noose around Cash's neck with each click of the tote board.

SHORT STORIES

NAGS AND SCRAP IRON . . . . **Jess Carver** **92**

Culpepper Twig takes his cue and garners a tip, thus stealing another march on Senator Flick.

COPPER SCENT . . . . . **Arthur Mann** **100**

Ace Promotion enterprises have a peculiar habit of exploding in that floor-pacing genius' face, Joe Feder.

DEPARTMENT

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COVER BY HUBERT ROGERS

NEXT ISSUE ON SALE WEDNESDAY NOVEMBER 27th 10c per COPY

All stories in this magazine are fiction. No actual persons are designated either by name or character. Any similarity is coincidental.

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Received And Noted

Some comments about Cash.
Two old friends return.

We've had some compliments and some complaints about Cash Gorman, and let us state here and now that we will bear the compliments in mind and note the complaints as warning flags on pitfalls to be avoided.

One very pertinent remark was made in a letter from a high government official whose name we are not privileged to divulge. He thought, "In this day of charge and countercharge by governments of the world, Cash Gorman is an escape from the bitterness rampant everywhere. He ought to be the perfect antidote for the businessman, large or small, white-collar worker or day laborer, who still believes there is adventure in a humdrum existence."

This is exactly what we hope to make of Cash, and in this issue he runs into a situation which, at sometime or another, has hit nearly everybody in the last few years. Cash, for sentiment's sake, rushes into a racetrack-building project and hits a syndicate made up of socialites, underworld and labor racketeers, and gamblers. The little problems they think up for Cash and Wilbur Drake to surmount in building Coral Island track are a caution. Right to the end of "Million-dollar Mutuel" it is nip and tuck whether Cash will come out without his neck, let alone his solvency.

But when the folding money starts getting low in Jeff's bankroll is exactly when Cash's famous wit and resourcefulness hit new highs of ingenuity and resultant success. With tough mobsters and racketeers gunning for him on every side, Cash sticks to his policy of going about unarmed. He has a couple of very close shaves but their outcome proves that a rapid-fire brain is more potent than a gatling gun, even in the society in which Cash and Jimmy Ranger find themselves thrown.

He runs acounter again of Phineas T. Gardiner, but this time Mr. Gardiner is more attentive to Cash's promotional genius, and they wind up cordially disliking the methods of each other. But their mutual respect sets the stage for a financial adventure of these two in collaboration in the next issue of Wizard. It is "Liquid Gold," and after you get through with "Million-dollar Mutuel" you'll want to meet these two buccaneers of finance again. Start now on Page 9, where Cash and Jimmy Ranger are greeted at Tamiami by Lias, who pleasantly tells them to "get out or else!"

• • •

We have also two other friends back for further treatment. Culpepper Twig and Joe Feder return in "Nags and Scrap Iron" and "Copper Scent." Cully is still having to do with Senator Flick, and not doing so badly, thank you. Joe Feder is chasing that elusive million and almost catches up with it by, of all things, actually interesting captains of industry in a process for hardening copper. And they almost fall. . . .

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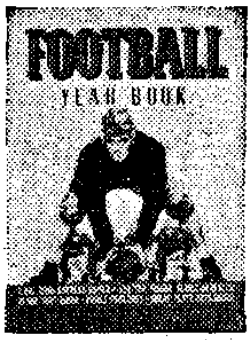

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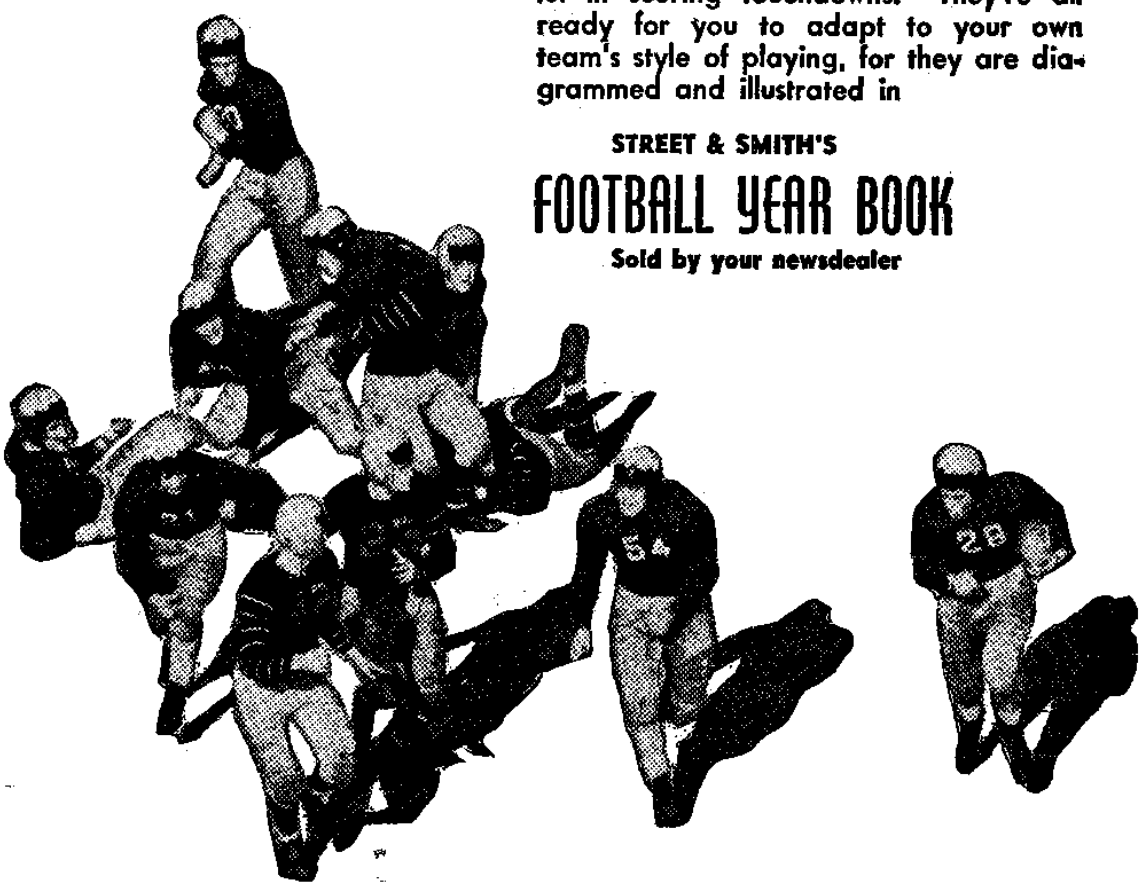

MILLION-DOLLAR MUTUEL

BY PHIL R. SHERIDAN

● Cash Gorman finds double crossing an art in a race-track project he enters for sentiment's sake. The enemy holds all the trump cards until Jeff declares deuces wild and leads an unscrupulous syndicate through a series of thrilling and dangerous episodes.

CHAPTER I.

STAY OUT OR ELSE.

JIMMY RANGER'S wide blue eyes searched the waiting room of the Pan American Air Base at Dinner Key. He was looking for an elderly and dignified gray-haired gentleman and he paid no attention to the huge, almost obscenely fat man, who, with his two hard-faced companions, was watching every move made by himself and Thomas Jefferson Gorman, his employer.

"Cash, I don't see anybody who answers to the description you gave me of Carson Bishop," he said when Gor-

man, his business with the customs officials done, rejoined his assistant, confidante, accountant and Man Thursday.

"You won't." There was an unfamiliar, heavy note in Jeff Gorman's voice as he extended a copy of the Tamiami *Tribune* to Jimmy, pointing to a front-page picture of the man for whom Jimmy had been looking. Beneath it was the headline:

"CARSON BISHOP
DEAD; BLOW TO
NEW RACETRACK"

A sub-head reported: "Suffers Heart Attack in Dentist's Chair; Famous Turf Figure for Thirty-five years; Was To Have Managed New Coral Island Track"

Jimmy Ranger was instantly suspicious. "I never heard of anyone dying in a dentist's chair," he said. Jimmy looked on the dark side of everything.

Jeff Gorman laughed. "Rest your mind," he said. "The story makes it clear that his death was from natural causes." He shook his head. "Damn shame. Carson Bishop was one grand citizen."

Jimmy Ranger spread his hands appealing. "Where does this leave us?" he asked. "We fly back to the 'States' to see Bishop and when we get here he's dead. We don't even know what he wanted."

"We do now," Jeff replied. "His cablegram had something to do with Coral Island Racetrack." The message to which he referred was the cryptic one which had brought them back to the United States from Brazil. All it said was: "Come arunning and bring your bank roll." Jeff had come immediately. Carson Bishop had once saved his financial goose. "Whatever proposition he had in mind is out now, and, possibly, from a business standpoint it's just as well," he continued. "The last time I had anything to do with racing it was a dog track and I wound up without the track and also without $100,000, from which I was very adroitly separated by Mr. Bill Barber."

Jimmy Ranger raised his eyebrows: "Who is Bill Barber?"

"A Chicago sports promoter. Incidentally he is operating a racetrack in Tamiami now. We probably would have been bucking him had Carson Bishop lived," Jeff replied. He enjoyed needling his sober-minded assistant, and added: "What would a $100,000 clipping do to us right now?"

Jimmy grimaced. "Ruin us, that's all," he said. "You and your Brazilian rubber planting corporations. Wow!"

Jeff's mouth split in the quick, twisted smile with which he always greeted remarks that touched his sense of humor; a flash of white teeth in a sun-darkened face. His Brazilian rubber brainstorm had not been conspicuously successful. In fact, one more such promotional effort and he would be a financial freelance without finances.

"Well, things do happen," he said. "As long as we're here we might as well catch the train to Tamiami and see what's going on."

A hoarse, thick voice addressed him: "You ain't goin' to Tamiami."

JEFF looked up in surprise to find his path blocked by an obese mountain of a man whose weight must have run close to three hundred pounds. The man was staring at him coldly through ferret eyes set deep in a thick-lipped, fat and sinister face.

"So I'm not going to Tamiami?" Jeff asked. His tone showed polite interest, as if the man had said it was

going to rain. "And why not, Prince Charming?"

The fat man's thick lips twisted in a mirthless smile: "It's been rainin' a lot," he said. His voice was heavy with sarcasm. "You might catch a cold. This is a bad climate to catch a cold in; you might get awful sick from it."

This witty observation brought a mechanical ingratiating laugh from two companions who had been standing just behind the bulky man. There was no laughter in their eyes, however, as they assumed threatening positions on each side of him; one a flint-faced, rawboned individual in soiled white and the other a dapper little man in flashy Broadway clothes with a shrewd face and the over-wise expression of a Broadway farer who lives without visible means of support. Six cold eyes stared at Jeff.

"Your solicitude for my health is very touching," he remarked. His voice hardened and he snapped: "Just who the devil are you?"

"I'm Nick Lias," the big man replied. Apparently he felt mention of his name was sufficient to identify him. To Jimmy Ranger it meant nothing, but Jeff Gorman's eyes narrowed to pinpoints. Lias was an Illinois gangster whose sinister reputation was well known to him.

"How's everything in Cicero, Nick?" he asked. He was completely at sea and he didn't care for this situtaion at all even though nothing in his attitude showed concern. The two men with Lias, he knew, were gunmen.

"I ain't in Cicero no more," Lias replied. "I've moved in on Tamiami."

"I'll bet the taxpayers are delighted," Jeff said.

"A wise guy, huh?" Lias sneered. "Listen, wise guy, if you know what's good for you, you're movin' out of Tamiami before you even get there—savvy?"

"Are you threatening me, Prince Charming?" Jeff asked, his eyes hard. But he wasn't as cool as he made out to be. Murder was one of Lias' more highly developed accomplishments.

"Naw," Lias said. "We wouldn't threaten him, would we, boys?" The boys found this immensely amusing and Lias continued: "We just want to protect you—see?"

Jeff looked at him thoughtfully: "Wouldn't it be funny if you were talking to the wrong man," he said. "Do you know who I am?"

"Huh?" Lias blinked. "Sure—you're Cash Gorman." Lias put his momentary shock of doubt behind him. "These boys of mine is going to see you to the train—or the plane if you want. Just buy a ticket for some place besides Tamiami and everything will be all right." The red, piggy little eyes swept up and down Jeff. "Or else—"

"What makes you so sure I'm Cash Gorman?" Jeff prodded him. "You never saw me before. Neither did these two Neanderthal throwbacks with you."

Lias grunted. "Just in case you want to know, wise guy—Bill Barber pointed you out."

Jeff shot a quick significant glance at Jimmy Ranger at this mention of Bill Barber, the owner of the Tamiami Park. Apparently Bishop's death hadn't dealt them completely out of the business into which Bishop had planned to introduce them.

"Make a note of Mr. Barber's name, lieutenant," Jeff said, a new brisk note in his voice. "Also that of Cash Gorman." He fixed hard eyes on Lias. "Give the names of these two men with you to Lieutenant Ranger, Mr. Lias."

Lias stared at him blankly. "What's this you're tryin' to pull, Gorman?" His two companions shifted their weight uneasily, looking around them. "You ain't no copper."

"Mr. Lias, you've been threatening a Federal official," Jeff told him. "I presume that you are aware of the fact that that is a penitentiary offense. In addition, you've been delaying an officer of the army who is on official business. I regret that the matter is not within my sphere and we have no time to waste on you. But you may expect a call tomorrow from a representative of the Federal attorney for this district."

"Your name," Jimmy Ranger snapped to the raw-boned gunman on Lias' left.

The man hesitated, looking to Lias for instruction.

"Where's your badge if you're a Federal man?" Lias demanded, but there was uncertainty in his voice, too.

"Men in my branch of the service do not use badges, Mr. Lias," he said. "Step aside, please." To Ranger he added: "When you have the names, lieutenant, join me outside. As quickly as possible please. We've wasted enough time as it is." He pushed past Lias and strode swiftly to the door.

"What's your name," Jimmy's voice cracked out the question like a command.

"Claw Mast," the big gunman said. "I mean Jack Mast—they call me Claw." The dapper little man spoke up without being asked. "Max Stein. Listen, lieutenant, this was all a joke. We were just out here to meet this fellow Gorman for some old friends of his and run a little rib on him, weren't we, Nick?"

"Yeah," Lias said. He looked hesitantly after Jeff. "Yeah, that was it. He's comin' up here to put a little dough in a proposition we're all interested in. This was just for a laugh."

Jimmy put away his notebook. "I'm not at all interested," he said. "Just step aside, please." He stomped heavily on one of Lias' feet when the big man moved too slowly for him. At the door he spoke quickly to Jeff: "Let's get out of here while we're all in one piece, Cash. Oh-Oh! Here they come again."

"Pay strictly no attention," Jeff said. A gray-green army limousine stopped in front of the door and the uniformed driver stepped smartly out, saluted, and told the porter where to stow their luggage.

Lias and his two henchmen, having thought things over and decided that a fast one had been pulled on them, pulled up short at the sight of the army car.

Jeff grasped Jimmy's arm. "Get in, you cluck," he muttered to his dazed assistant, shoving him toward the door of the car. Jeff got in afterward. The private closed the door with a military flourish and took his place behind the wheel. As the car pulled out, Jeff looked back through the rear window.

"Nick and the boys are going to be quite a while getting over this," he remarked. "They look very unhappy."

"Come on," Jimmy said. "Where did this army car come from?"

"It was just sitting out in front ready to move off," Jeff said. "Some officer came over here to catch a clipper, so I gave the driver twenty dollars and asked him to take us to the railroad station."

JEFF sank back in his seat to review the situation, his face thoughtful. It was a face with irregular features and not at all handsome. Except for the saving grace of a humorous mouth, his countenance would have been of a harsh, even ruthless cast. It was a

long face with high cheekbones and his nose had a suspicious, small knot at the bridge; as if it might have been broken once. His eyes, however, were the feature which commanded attention. They were constantly alert, black and penetrating. Jeff was leisurely in his movements and one who didn't note his eyes might put him down as an accomplished, well tailored loafer. He was a half inch short of six feet and his shoulders were adequate, but not overly broad and, if anything, he was on the thin side.

Jimmy Ranger was his opposite number. Where Jeff's hair was coarse and black, Jimmy's was sand colored and his eyes were blue, china shade. His face was open, rugged and square. And good humored. He was barrel chested and his shoulders were massive. Sitting down he looked like a fullback and one expected a giant to arise, but he was three inches shorter than Jeff, to whom he had sold himself as an assistant in Denver where he had come in contact with Gorman while working as house detective in the Golden Fleece Hotel, no engineering firms having jumped at the opportunity of employing him when he graduated from Colorado Mines. Jimmy was possibly twenty-four or twenty-five; some five years younger than his employer, whose actual age he didn't know but who might be anywhere in his late twenties or early thirties.

"There are two things I'd like to know about this situation," Jeff remarked, finally. "One: how did Lias and Bill Barber know that I was coming here to see Bishop in the first place and, knowing it, how did they know the exact time of my arrival. Two: why are they so anxious to get me out of town?"

Jimmy Ranger lifted his head from the newspaper which he had been reading with deep concentration: "I still never heard of a guy dying in the dentist's chair."

Jeff waved an impatient hand. "No—the answer is somewhere in that paragraph which says that it will now be virtually impossible for Coral Island Racetrack to open in time to comply with the operating license granted it by the State Racing Commission," he hummed. Jimmy knew that his employer was contemplating action. "You know, if Brother Nick and his torpedoes hadn't come out to welcome us back to the United States, I would have sent flowers to Bish's funeral and forgotten this matter as of yesterday. However, anything which has such a great nuisance value to Bill Barber, Nick Lias and other gentlemen possessed of folding currency should not be idly discarded without investigation. I would not be surprised but what the veddy, veddy social Mr. J. Walter Logan, president of the Flamingo Jockey Club, is not also interested in the suppression of competition. Yes, sir—we must have a look."

Jimmy Ranger sighed. Hardly a day passed when he was not depressed by a strong feeling that economic security was a matter with which he would never become personally acquainted. "Why don't we go into some reliable business, Cash?" he asked plaintively. "You know, something with a good sound basis and a bright future—like the manufacture of machine guns or gin."

Jeff looked out the rear window. "We may have something to do with machine guns any minute now when we shed the protection of the United States Army," he remarked. "There's a car following us with two strange men in

the front seat." He shook his head. "There is something wrong with this picture. They look like cops."

CHAPTER II.

RIPENING THE MELON.

IN THE president's office at the Flamingo Jockey Club, overlooking one of America's most beautiful winter racetracks, J. Walter Logan spread the Tamiami *Tribune* on the desk before him and inspected Carson Bishop's picture.

"Terrible thing," Logan said. "Of course, we had our differences, but he was one of the grand old men of the American turf."

Bill Barber, a one-time professional gambler who had become one of the country's most famous sports promoters and had recently purchased Tamiami Park, the resort city's other track, looked curiously from the newspaper to Logan and then laughed. "I don't suppose it ever occurred to you that Bishop's death is a lucky thing for us," he said, tipping his chair back on its rear legs and puffing complacently on a pure Havana cigar; his round, innocent face suffused with an expression of placid content. "Even if young Wilbur Drake does get Coral Island Park open, not a horseman in the country will take his stable near the place with Bishop dead; providing we play our cards right." He rubbed his bald, pink head and his round blue eyes beamed with a warm light as he added: "But he won't open—not now. Yes, sir, that was a very fortunate heart attack, J. W. You couldn't have arranged it better yourself."

Logan's long, horselike face flushed a deep red beneath his heavy sun tan and his bushy eyebrows contracted in a frown over his narrow eyes. He was a big, broad-chested man of fifty-seven who looked ten years younger. Stroke on the Crimson crew in his college days, he had kept himself in shape and now, except that he had gained in weight with the years, he looked as if he could *still* take care of himself.

"I don't like remarks like that, Barber," he snapped. He made no effort to conceal his contempt for Barber. "A man of your background, I suppose, could not be expected to understand my feelings in this matter, but Carson Bishop was a gentleman and a credit to the American turf. Despite the fact that we had a falling out over the manner in which Chicago Park was to be conducted and were, naturally, on opposite sides of the fence in this matter, I had the greatest respect for him. He came from one of our best families and always conducted himself as a sportsman should."

Barber's thin mouth wrinkled scornfully: "Save that old school-chum stuff for the newspapers, Logan. You don't have to kid me. I'm not the guy who puts your name in the social register. I haven't any more use for you than you have for me, but we're both in this together to keep that track from opening and what we're doing hasn't anything to do with improving the breed of the horse, either. What's concerned is dough. You do your part and it's in the bag now. We can give young Drake such a bouncing around on Coral Island that it'll be years before anybody'll even think about opening a competitive racetrack in these parts."

Logan jabbed viciously at the button on his desk, speaking simultaneously to Barber in a strained voice: "I *am* interested in the improvement of the breed and you know it. There aren't sufficient horses of worthwhile quality to

furnish cards for an additional winter track and the opening of Coral Island could have only the worst results; encouraging horsemen to race anything with four legs."

"Nuts," said Barber. "It would encourage customers not to go to Flamingo Park and plank their good dough down at the mutuel windows—"

Logan held up a silencing hand as his secretary entered the office. "Take a telegram, Miss Sharp," he said. "To Mrs. Carson Bishop: 'Please accept my heartfelt condolences for your great loss; a loss which will be felt by the entire American Turf where Carson was so well known and greatly beloved. I feel honored to have once been associated with Carson and his loss has come as a great shock to me and the sport to which he has contributed so much. I can do no more than echo the thoughts of horsemen everywhere that he was a gentleman and a sportsman in the truest sense of the words.'"

Logan paused thoughtfully and then said: "That will be all, Miss Sharp. Take care of the flowers, please."

Barber looked at the older man cynically. "You've forgotten something."

"What's that?" Logan asked, suspiciously.

"Copies for the newspapers. You don't want so beautiful a rose to blush unseen."

Logan's jaw set grimly and it was apparent that he was holding onto his temper with difficulty, but he said nothing. His secretary paused uncertainly.

Logan cleared his threat. "See that the press is informed of the contents of the message, Miss Sharp," he ordered, finally, avoiding Barber's eyes.

"Very sportsmanlike, lacey pants," Barber commented. "You'll get a big cheer from Palm Beach."

He enjoyed riding Logan, who had refused to have anything to do with him until the threat of a new track made it advantageous for them to combine forces to keep wealthy young Wilbur Drake from opening Coral Island Park. In addition, Barber was jealous of the fact that Flamingo Park attracted larger and smarter crowds, was more beautiful than Tamiami Park, drew finer horses, enjoyed better racing dates than did his own track and had a blue ribbon reputation not enjoyed by Tamiami Park, which was much frequented by racketeers and others of a like social scale and was sometimes the scene of turf happenings which caused raised eyebrows. "Now that your good deed is all taken care of for the day, let's get down to business."

"Barber, if you continue your insulting attitude, you're going to regret it," Logan said, angrily.

"We're pals; you shouldn't talk like that," Barber grinned. "Anyway, you're never gonna do anything to me; I could wash too much dirty linen. Now let's get down to cases. Bishop's death ought to put the clincher on young Drake, but just to make sure that what horsemen have already taken their stables to Coral Island, or made arrangements to do it, now take themselves out of there, let's just pass the word around that anybody who keeps his horses there is going to have a lot of trouble racing any place else come the spring season. Not to mention next winter. That's your department. Swing your weight around. It's safe now."

Logan pulled thoughtfully at his long, curved nose. "That hardly seems necessary. I've learned that Drake has exhausted all his funds—poured $700,000 into Coral Island and can't raise any more any place. He's tried all the

Jeff looked and saw Steamboat Ginnis, whom he knew to be a strong-arm man.

banks and his relatives refuse to have anything to do with the project. He can't possibly open; the grandstand is only half completed."

"Yeah, but you get after those horsemen. If he hasn't any horses, he won't be able to open—that's a cinch," Barber said. "And he might raise the dough."

"Where?"

"Well, Lias had a couple of guys tailin' him and he and that red-headed dame he's going to marry—"

Logan interrupted him sharply. "Miss Dallas Reid is not a dame. She is a young lady and a relative of mine by marriage. Just remember that please."

"This debutante he's going to marry and him went over to Havana this morning right after they heard about Bishop," Barber corrected himself, adding sarcastically: "I didn't know this was all in the family."

"Confine yourself to the business at hand, please," Logan said, dryly. "Why did they go to Havana?"

"To see Phineas T. Gardiner," Bill Barber retorted. He enjoyed the shock which mention of the New York financier's name invoked in Logan. "Old sharp-shooting money-bags himself."

"Gardiner is something of a speculator all right," Logan said. "But when he speculates he knows what he's doing. I doubt if anything in as desperate shape as Coral Island would appeal to him. However, I know him and—" He reached for the inter-office telephone. "See if you can locate Mr. Phineas T. Gardiner in Havana. He's probably at the Hotel Nacional," he told his secretary. To Barber, he added: "I'll inform him of the unsoundness of the proposition. I wouldn't want him to throw money away on anything so hopeless."

"You sure are being a boy scout today," Barber said, but there was grudging admiration in his voice. Logan always had such a smooth justifiation for anything he did. In order to hold up his own end, he reported: "Well, I got Nick Lias and his boys workin' on the contractors on the job again and they're putting another shake on Drake. He'll have to take care of it if he can. He can't afford any tie-ups if he wants to make that opening date the racing commission put on him in his license. He's only got seventeen days now."

"Then why worry about the horsemen; they'll either leave the park if they've already come down or they'll cancel stable reservations when they see how things are going," Logan com-

mented. "I don't like to make so obvious a move unless it's necessary."

"Well, it don't do any harm—they may have one more shot," Barber said. "I find out three or four days ago Bishop sends a telegram to Cash Gorman, who is down in Brazil. He tells Cash to come on the run and bring his bank roll with him. Cash got in today. I don't see what he can do, but I'm always nervous when he's around."

Logan looked at him blankly. "Who is Cash Gorman?"

"Thomas Jefferson Gorman is his name," Barber explained. "He doesn't get in the papers much, but he gets around an awful lot. They call him Cash because he usually has four or five thousand bucks in his pocket and doesn't care who knows it. I don't know why, but he must have a reason. He's a very hard-headed young guy."

Logan looked disturbed. "Is he wealthy?"

"You never know from day to day," Barber said. "But if he hasn't got it, he's an awful fast man producing a buck. He can walk into any gambling joint in the country without a dime and play on I. O. U.'s."

"Oh," Logan said contemptuously. "A gambler."

"Not the way you mean it," Barber said. "He's not a professional gambler. He just likes to gamble. He'll gamble on anything. That's what worries me. He might take a shine to this setup and he could cause us a lot of trouble. He's slick and tough. And he always operates legally."

Logan frowned. "Gorman, eh? I still don't seem to place him. What business is he in?"

"Any business where he can make a buck—or thinks he can. Oil wildcatting. Gold mines. He took a flyer on a pineapple cannery once. He's nobody to fool with. I hear a couple of months back he's over in Shanghai and he sells the Chinese a boatload of Japanese machine guns."

"What was his connection with Bishop?" Logan asked.

Barber shook his head. "Dunno. They were old friends. Bishop did him a favor of some kind once and he's one of those guys that comes through when he gets an S O S."

"Does Drake know him?"

Barber shook his head and Logan pursed his lips thoughtfully. "I can't see that we have anything to worry about then. He might have helped Bishop out for sentimental reasons, as you suggest, or just because he had confidence in Bishop, but under the present circumstances he wouldn't be inclined to gamble on anything with two feet in the grave if he's as shrewd as you say he is."

"Yeah, maybe so," Barber replied. His blue eyes twinkled. "Maybe the whole problem has already been solved. Nick Lias was on hand to greet Cash today when he arrived at Dinner Key—I pointed Cash out to him and then I left. I figured it was better to let Nick take care of Cash in his own way. Also, I'm like you about things of that kind, J. W.—I don't like to know what's going on."

Logan drummed the table nervously: "Lias had a couple of his hoodlums with him, I suppose?"

Barber smiled paternally. "Well, Nick always has a couple of his torpedoes around in case anybody should take an active dislike to him. You can't have a night club like the Golden Pheasant with gambling in the back and be secretary of the bartenders' union and a director of the building trades

union, not to mention running the numbers racket, without a few enemies."

Barber enjoyed feeling this information off because the president of the Flamingo Jockey Club so obviously didn't like to be reminded of the active collaborators of his present enterprise.

"No rough stuff," Logan said irritably. "It might get traced back to us and there's been enough in the newspapers about our legislative tactics and bribing the race commission without adding strong-arm methods, which are entirely unnecessary. Besides, from what you tell me of Gorman, he doesn't sound like he would scare easily."

Barber shrugged. "He don't scare easy, but he's a sensible young man and he might be impressed some. He don't care much for rough stuff himself. Just knowing Lias and me was in on this deal might make him pull in his horns—he knows it's hard to beat a man at his own racket, particularly in seventeen days. Also, a friend of his sucked him in on a dog track deal in Chicago once and I took him for the track and a hundred grand. He should not like tracks—"

The telephone interrupted them.

"For you," Logan said. He was angry. "I thought it was agreed that people were not to know that we were conferring?"

"This must be something important," Barber said, seizing the phone. It was Nick Lias.

"Listen, Bill," Lias said, his harsh voice almost shrill with temper. "That guy Gorman give us the slip."

"What happened?" Barber asked, wryly.

"Well, he tells us he's a Federal agent of some kind on army business and threatens to sick the Federal attorney on us tomorrow so I figure maybe you made a mistake. I'm sure of it when he and this guy with him—he calls him a lieutenant—walk out and get in a United States Army limousine with a couple of stars on it and drives off with a soldier running the car. Then I begin thinkin' maybe he pulled a fast one, but I'm afraid to tail him so I call up the cops and they have a couple of plain-clothes dicks tail the army car and he goes downtown and gets out at an automobile showroom—see. He buys a car and pays cash for it and drives off. Him and this other guy. Well, the cops find out his name is Gorman from the auto people and they call me and then go chasin' after him and he goes out to Carson Bishop's house and sees the old lady, but before we can get there him and this other guy have breezed. The two flatfeet trail him and guess where he goes?"

"Let's not play games," Barber said sarcastically. "What happened?"

"He goes over to the lake and parks the car by that pavilion, with the keys in the car, and him and this other guy rent a couple of peddle boats—you know them things that look like you was riding a bicycle on water—so the cops see he's left the keys in the car and he's right out there in front of them so they sit down to have a beer while he and this other guy chase each other around the lake. Pretty soon they go up one of them little side canals and when we get there a taxi driver comes along and gives the boat man the two peddle boats."

Bill Barber delivered himself of a few choice old Anglo-Saxon expressions on the subject of Nick's stupidity.

"Dry up," Nick growled. "If you'd 'a' hung around it wouldn't have happened in the first place. But listen—a guy only pulls a stunt like that on

Nick Lias once; just once."

"I hope so," Barber said. "I wonder what he talked to Mrs. Bishop about?"

"How should I know?" Lias demanded. "You think he's dealt himself in on Coral Park?"

"Maybe he's just looking the ground over," Barber replied. "Get those bums of yours out looking for him—try the Neptune Hotel. He always stays there—"

Logan received this news coolly.

"I can see no cause for worry," he remarked. "Even if Gorman does furnish young Drake with additional funds, it just occurred to me that our friends Nordoff and Manley will be able to take care of the situation."

At mention of Rodney Nordoff, the State Racing Commissioner, and State Senator Harry Manley, Bill Barber's eyes narrowed shrewdly. He was not without political influence himself, but he had been content to leave this part of the campaign to Logan, whose more secure position and reputation made him the ideal man to carry through this work.

"What have you got in mind?" Barber asked.

Logan casually inspected his well-manicured fingernails. "The opening date for Coral Island might be moved ahead a week or ten days. The track couldn't be finished in that time."

Even Bill Barber was startled. "Great Jumpin' Jupiter! And you talk about strong-arm methods! What's that?"

"If the legislature and the racing commission take steps, it's legal for one thing," Logan pointed out.

"Yeah, but the newspapers!" Barber expostulated.

"Don't you have any sports writers on your, ah, publicity pay roll?" Logan asked. "Of course, there might be some comment, particularly on the editorial side, but as long as we avoid strong-arm methods I think we can count upon the public's short memory and, after all, it really doesn't amount to a great deal what the public thinks in a state where politicians are so amenable to reason. Naturally, I would prefer not to adopt so drastic a plan, but if Gorman takes a hand he'll get an unpleasant surprise. The mere threat should be sufficient to deter him."

Logan cleared his throat and looked pointedly toward the door. "Now, if you don't mind, Mr. Barber, I have some thing to attend to that can't wait."

Barber's plump pink face flushed at this curt dismissal. "Back on the right side of the tracks again, huh?" he sneered, adding with grudging admiration: "When it comes to larceny with a book of etiquette in your hand, Whitney didn't have a thing on you."

"I'll thank you to keep your comments to yourself," Logan snapped. "I consider it for the good of racing to see that Coral Island Park doesn't open and I intend to so see. Good-day, Mr. Barber."

"Anything to improve the breed—that's us," Barber commented. "So long, pal."

CHAPTER III.

PAGING MR. GARDINER.

CASH looked extremely well in a white dinner jacket and, what was more, he knew it; a factor which added to the pleasant feeling of exhilaration he experienced as he stepped into the gambling rooms at the Casion Nacional in Havana. The whir of the roulette wheels, the rattle of cast dice, the click of chips, the ring of silver dollars and

the monotonously rising and falling voices of the croupiers and dealers cutting through the hum of tense table talk was music to his ears.

"What is this? A parade?" asked Jimmy Ranger as flunkies bowed on all sides, practically to the floor, and gentlemen in tails rushed forward to extend warm welcomes while dealers and an occasional player called out greetings.

"The return of the fatted calf," said Jeff, grinning. "They're just happy because they hope action is on its way in. Are you going to play?"

Jimmy shook his head. "I'll just watch you lose your money, maestro," he said. "Hang onto enough for my weekly pay check, will you? Or is that asking too much?"

"It is," Jeff replied, which was the answer Jimmy fully expected. There were occasions when his position was very trying to a man of his comparatively cautious nature and solid respect for negotiable assets.

"We didn't fly all the way over here in the dark just to gamble, did we?" he asked, Jeff having been so preoccupied with analyzing Carson Bishop's private statistical sheets on the Coral Island racetrack that nothing else had been discussed.

"No," Jeff replied. "We came over here to see our old and esteemed friend, Mr. Phineas T. Gardiner."

"What?"

Yes, sir, old money-bags is some place in Havana," Jeff said. "I didn't get much out of Mrs. Bishop—she hardly knew what was going on—but she did tell me that Wilbur Drake was coming over here today to talk fresh money for his track with Gardiner. Personally, those charts of Carson's that we borrowed add up to a dead horse, but if Gardiner sees anything in this proposition I want to know what it is. He doesn't often go running off on a wild goose chase."

Jimmy looked at his employer in amazement. "You don't expect to find Gardiner here do you? He wouldn't gamble with your money."

"No, I don't, but he wasn't at the hotel and Drake might—" Jeff broke off and a delighted grin lit up his face. "As I live and breathe; there he is. To think that anything so plebian as craps would attract a wizard of Wall Street."

Jimmy located Mr. Gardiner, a heavy-set gentleman who ran to jowels and a beefsteak complexion, and permitted himself a laugh. "He was not wizarding so good the last time we met him," he remarked. "I'll bet he'll be tickled pink to see us."

"I'll give you five to one he's not betting more than a dollar a play," Jeff said. "At that, it's almost miraculous to see him throwing the stuff around this way."

There was room for a player next to the financier and Jeff occupied it, greeting Gardiner cheerily by name. Frosty blue eyes darted swiftly at Jeff and it was apparent that Gardiner was displeased at being recognized and even more irritated at being addressed. "I haven't the pleasure of your acquaintance, young man," he said testily. "And furthermore, I'm not interested in making—" The frosty blue eyes swung back to Jeff again in surprise. "Oh! It's you again!"

"The cordial note in your voice warms my heart," Jeff grinned. "How's the helium business?"

Mr. Gardiner's face took on added color although it is difficult to conceive of such an event. A rumble arose in

his throat, but no distinct words separated themselves from the sound. Helium was a tender subject with Mr. Gardiner.

"Ah, well," Jeff remarked. "Let's not go raking up the sordid past. What brings you to Cuba?"

"None of your damned business," said Gardiner, placing a one-dollar bet on the win line. "What the hell did you do to that oil company. It's going through 7-B and the stock's worth about fifty cents."

Jeff took a fold of bills from his pocket which caused two platinum blondes and a lean, hungry-looking gentleman on the opposite side of the table to start as if they had been given the hot foot and removed a hundred dollars, placing it on the win bar beside Gardiner's chip. "I told you to sell me that stock for seven dollars a share while you could," he replied. "Maybe you'll listen to me the next time."

"Maybe somebody'll get his throat slit if we ever wind up on the same side of the street again," Gardiner growled cordially. The player made his point and Jeff's one hundred dollars became two hundred dollars while Gardiner's dollar became two dollars.

"My way is better," Jeff remarked. When the dice were passed to Gardiner, the New Yorker recklessly placed five chips on the win bar. Jeff winked at Jimmy Ranger over Gardiner's shoulder and placed two five-hundred-dollar bills beside Gardiner's five dollars. "Faint heart ne'er won any money at dice, Phineas," he said. "I have confidence in you." Gardiner's hand froze in mid-air as he looked at the two bills and then he rolled the dice out. Two aces.

Jimmy Ranger shuddered as Jeff's two five-hundred-dollar bills disappeared into the stickman's box. Gardiner grinned like a cat in a creamery.

"I think you did that with malice aforethought," Jeff said. He laughed. "I'm going to pick up my marbles and leave this table. See you around, money-bags."

Gardiner chuckled. "I told you somebody would get his throat slit," he said with keen enjoyment. "By the way, there's a little proposition I've come across recently that might appeal to you. Seemed more in your line than mine."

Jeff looked at Gardiner suspiciously, but he had a hard time repressing a laugh. Apparently Mr. Gardiner did not like the Coral Island racetrack proposition and was now going to give it to him. "What makes you think I'd be interested in any of your discarded, second-hand herrings?" he asked.

Gardiner shrugged. "Speaking personally, I never pass anything by without hearing what it's about."

"I'm all ears."

"So I noticed," Phineas remarked, touching a tender spot with Jeff, whose ears were a trifle on the Gable side. "Well, the party will be around later tonight and I'll introduce you to her."

Jeff was startled. "Her?" He had expected Drake's name to be mentioned. Gardiner nodded. "You'll like her. Very attractive woman. Sound proposition, too. So she tells me. Not the kind of thing I'm experienced in, however. I thought of you instantly."

Jeff didn't press Gardiner. The man had some kind of iron in the fire and he wanted to find out what it was. With a man like Gardiner the best policy was to wait him out.

"Who do you think he's talking about?" Jimmy asked. "What woman is mixed up in the Coral Island proposition."

Jeff shrugged. "I think I'll circulate around a little and see if there isn't some information to be picked up. Keep an eye on Gardiner." He shook his head. "There's something wrong here. Too many people are very anxious to keep me out of this or get me into it."

"IF this is a damsel in distress," Jimmy said, "please button up your check book and keep your dough in your pocket. If there was a nickel in this proposition, Gardiner would have it cornered. All he ever gives away are lemons."

"Lemons are very useful items sometimes," Jeff remarked. "And I'd like to get on the right side of that crusty old badger. He moves around in a lot of big-time propositions."

Jeff crowded into the table where the largest number of players denoted action. "Hi-ya, Cash," the stickman greeted him. "Long time—no see."

"Hello, Deacon," Jeff smiled. "What do you have here, parchesi?"

"It's a real game, Cash," Deacon Jones said. "Get that bundle of cabbage out."

Jeff nodded. "I'll just look on for a minute, Deacon, and see how it goes." Meeting the Deacon was a break. They'd been meeting this way for a long time and were on good terms.

The Deacon leaned toward him as he raked in the dice. "It's been a lose bar night, Jeff. Never seen so many wrong dice." In an even lower voice, he added, "Some of the boys hear from Tamiami that Nick Lias' gorillas are out lookin' for you, pal."

"Thanks," Jeff replied, equally softly. He studied the players, his eyes halting in surprise at a girl opposite him; a well-groomed and expensively-dressed girl with dark-red hair and thin haughty features. He was surprised to see that she had been staring at him. She turned her eyes away under his gaze.

"She looks like she ought to be playing roulette," Jeff remarked to the Deacon. "Or is she just slumming?"

"Ye olde seven; pay that win bar," the Deacon sing-songed. To Jeff he said, in surprise, out of the corner of his mouth: "Don't you know her?"

Jeff shook his head. "Get on him, folks, he's a lucky shooter," the Deacon pattered; his voice dropped again, "That's young Drake's girl friend. I thought you're in on this new race-track?"

Jeff shook his head. "I've been in Brazil."

"You hear Carson Bishop dies?" the Deacon asked. He was a long-faced youthful man with a gambler's pallor.

Jeff nodded. "I was on my way back to see him."

The Deacon took up his spiel again. "Ye olde eleven and nobody there. You can't win 'em if you don't bet 'em, folks. Make room for players, please." His voice dropped again. "Maybe you're lucky. That plant's a sure-fire flop. I don't think even Bishop could have pulled it out."

The dice were passed to the girl and Jeff got down on the lose bar with one hundred dollars. She threw an ace, deuce the first time out and shot an angry glance at Jeff, as if he were personally responsible. She played three hundred dollars the next time out and Jeff let his lose bar bet ride, sliding another hundred to Deacon Jones.

"Boxcars."

Deacon placed the bill on the double six. Two sixes came up.

The girl's glance was venomous as the Deacon spread his hands to indicate

he didn't have enough money to pay off and the cashier counted out twenty-nine one-hundred-dollar bills, saying, "You're still up, Cash."

"Nix," Jeff said. "Take me off." He collected the extra hundred and smiled at the girl. He always bet against women, but she had no way of knowing that. She threw the dice viciously making a ten for a point.

"Ten's her point, how about some hard-way tens here," the Deacon asked, telling Jeff in an aside. "I hear Drake's so hard up she's over here with twenty-five G's and trying to make it grow."

Jeff "protected" his lose bar bet with one hundred dollars on the hard-way ten.

"How about another hard-way, folks," the Deacon asked. "That's a sucker bet, Cash," he grinned at Jeff. "You thinkin' some about this track?"

Jeff nodded.

"It's no good," the gambler said. "Drake's out $700,000 on it. And there ain't no more."

"What's the story," Jeff asked.

Deacon called his play and murmured: "His old man left him a chunk of dough and he goes into the contracting business. He was O. K. at it, too, until he gets the contract to build this horse park. The money guys go broke with the place half built and he's stuck —but bad."

Jeff nodded. "Instead of taking his loss he decided to take the place over himself and completed it, eh?"

"Yeah—now he's in the race racket," the Deacon said. "He didn't know when he was well off. All those hard-way points are comin' up, folks. Let's have some hard-way bets here. Get this, Cash: "Logan and Bill Barber are pals now and they're smackin' him every time he turns around."

"What's Nick Lias got to do with it?" Jeff asked.

"Ten's the point; she's hotting for a ten," Deacon crooned. "Lias has a piece in Tamiami Park so he don't want to see no competition move in on him. He keeps labor and the contractors stirred up."

"What's the girl's name?" Jeff asked.

"Dallas Reid," the Deacon said. Aloud he cried, "That's her point. Ten and she made it the hard way. Pay off that win bar."

Jeff grinned and saluted Dallas Reid as he turned a profit with his hard-way ten bet. Once more he got down on the lose bar and Dallas Reid lost the dice trying to make a five. With a cold look for Jeff, she left the table.

The Deacon laughed. "If you're going into the horse park business you certainly start off by making yourself popular with your new partner's girl. I don't know what he's like, but she's sure snooty."

The dice got hot and there was no more conversation between Jeff and the Deacon for a few moments. "Drake seems to have a lot of courage, anyway," Jeff finally remarked.

"Either he's got more money than good sense or he's one of those guys that has to be hit with a steam roller before he knows he's licked," the Deacon replied. He jerked his head over his shoulder. "The dame's being tailed by Steamboat Ginnis."

Jeff started. "Steamboat Ginnis? Here?"

"Look over at the third roulette table where she's playing."

Jeff looked and saw Steamboat Ginnis, whom he knew to be a strong-arm man. "What's the idea?"

The Deacon shrugged. "He's working for Nick Lias and how should I

know what Nick, or maybe Bill Barber, is thinking about? I make my twelve bucks a day and mind my own business, except when you're around, but I never pass anything but the time of day with you, anyway."

"I think I'll have a little talk with Steamboat," Jeff said. He laid two hundred dollars on the table beside the Deacon. "For the boys. It was always nice and instructive to have people glad to see you."

CHAPTER IV.

INFORMATION PLEASE.

JEFF smiled upon Steamboat Ginnis in the most friendly fashion. "And how is everything with the family Ginnis?" he inquired.

"Everything is good with us," Steamboat said, looking unduly surprised at seeing Jeff. "I thought you was in Tamiami, Cash."

"No, I'm right here," Jeff assured him. "You can pinch me if you want to, Steamboat."

"Gee you're comical," Steamboat remarked with broad sarcasm. He was a flat-faced, squat and swarthy individual who had never been born with the name Ginnis, Jeff felt sure. He had once tried to shoot Jeff so they had something in common. "Why ain't you in Tamiami?" Steamboat demanded.

"Was I supposed to be in Tamiami?" Jeff asked.

"Sure you was," said Mr. Ginnis. "Don't try to kid me. Say, what are you doing here, anyway?" There was deep suspicion in his voice.

"Your information regarding my original destination was remarkably bad to say the least, Steamboat," Jeff commented. "You expect me in Tamiami and here I am in Havana. Your pipe line into Coral Island Park must be very bad."

"Oh, yeah?" Steamboat asked. "Listen, we know everything that's goin' on around that joint. You was supposed to be in Tamiami today by clipper. Can we help it if you change your mind before you get there."

"I suppose not," Jeff smiled. He chalked one up for himself. Steamboat was long on muscle but he had been overlooked in the gray matter department. "Do I understand your esteemed employer was going to meet me at the plane and give me the keys to the city?"

"You're always understandin' something," Steamboat said. "So what if he was going to meet you?"

"Yes, so what?"

"So he was going to tell you to keep your nose clean," Steamboat said. He permitted himself an ominous leer. "So I'll tell you myself. Keep your nose clean!"

Jeff dusted his nose with his handkerchief. "I'll do my best, Steamboat, but it's hard to do with a racetrack floating around loose that could be had for very little and make so very much."

Steamboat waved a hamlike paw in disgust. "That joint wouldn't make a nickel—all it would do would be take customers away from the other parks and cut everybody's take down. Be yourself. Smarten up."

"I realize that, Steamboat," Jeff said offhandedly. "But if it once opened and established racing dates it would be worth two and a half million dollars for the other parks to buy it out and keep it closed."

"You're wacky," Steamboat declared with conviction. "They wouldn't give a mile and a half for the joint and it's

already got seven hundred thousand bucks in it—not counting the dough the original parties lost on it. It'll run a million to finish it and then it won't open. Don't be a sap!"

Jeff considered this information. The nuisance value of Coral Island Park must be somewhere around a million and a quarter dollars, possibly a million and a half.

"Thanks, Steamboat," Jeff said. "It's always very instructive talking with you."

JEFF slid into a seat beside Dallas Reid at the roulette table. She was losing heavily and playing with a hard intentness that precluded her recognizing anyone; a high fever flush in her cheeks. She bracketed twenty-seven in a bet that ran to three hundred dollars and lost.

"You'll never get it that way," Jeff murmured.

She looked at him sharply and her face surged with angry color. "I don't know you," she said, tilting her head higher and returning her attention to the table.

"Unlucky girl," said Jeff. She bet again and lost. Jeff slipped a five-hundred-dollar bill from his vest pocket and nodded at the croupier, murmuring "red." To Dallas Reid, he said: "This is the way to do it." Black came up for the fifth time.

"Aren't you clever," she said, giving him a fleeting look of cold amusement. "Show me more."

Jeff laughed. "I can't; it would break me. Do you know that there's a character by the name of Steamboat Ginnis shadowing you—a representative of Mr. Nick Lias, the Tamiami larceny specialist?"

He saw her grow paler, but she didn't even look at him. "I'm not acquainted with either of those people, fortunately. And to be perfectly frank, I think you're letting your imagination run away with you. If you're harboring any ideas that I'm going to swoon in your arms and ask you to be my gallant protector, you're wasting your time. Why don't you go away—you're bad luck to me."

She was a beautifully spoiled person, Jeff reflected. "Why were you staring at me back at the dice table—when I first came into the game?"

"You reminded me of King Kong—I just wondered if there actually was such a person."

"Thanks," Jeff said, dryly. "It wasn't by any chance because the dealers greeted me as Cash?"

She looked at him sharply. "It was as a matter of fact," she said. Her eyes, he noted, were hazel and she wore her mouth with a one-corner-downward curl of phony cynicism. "I was told something today regarding a man named Cash Gorman. Is that you?"

Jeff stared at her in considerable amazement. She spoke as if she were asking if he were the porter; a person she could summon to her bidding with a gesture of her finger. "The world is probably full of people called Cash," Jeff said. He arose. "However, if I were Cash Gorman and you were interested in approaching me with regard to a large sum of money, the attitude you adopted would hardly have been diplomatic. It's been informative knowing you, Miss Reid."

Dallas Reid looked angrily after Jeff as he left.

"Who is that man?" she asked sharply of the croupier.

"Cash Gorman," she was informed.

JEFF beckoned to Jimmy Ranger. He indicated Dallas Reid with a nod of his head. "That's the girl Gardiner was talking about. She's Drake's fiancée. Came over here with him today."

Jimmy inspected her. Rowdy-dow," he remarked.

"Very much so," Jeff grinned. "Tell Phineas 'no dice'."

Jimmy sighed with relief. "I'm glad of that—it looked like a hungry mastiff to me; eat us out of house and home."

Jeff nodded. "The place would have a nuisance value if it could be opened, but there are too many odds against opening." He enumerated them, using his fingers as a tally sheet. "First: Logan has the racing commission and the legislature in his pocket. Second, he and Bill Barber are teamed up and Barber is a very shrewd and powerful man in sporting circles generally. Third, Lias has a piece in Tamiami Park and we very well might get torpedoed. Fourth, it would take too much money; more than I have as a matter of fact. Fifth, Miss Dallas Reid is a brat and if Drake is crazy about her he must be cut from the same social pattern; it would be impossible to get along with people like that. Sixth, Miss Reid is a very wealthy young woman herself, but she isn't putting up any of her money. Seventh, Gardiner doesn't want it but for reasons of his own he would like to saddle it off on me. I'm not having any, thank him."

Jimmy returned almost immediately. "He won't take 'no' for an answer. He wants to talk to you."

Jeff laughed. "I expected that. Now we'll find out why he wants to needle me into this. It would be fun to sell him his own turkey, wouldn't it?"

CHAPTER V.

HELLO, SUCKER!

PHINEAS GARDINER was at the bar. "You said you'd listen to this proposition," he accused Jeff. "Are you a man of your word or aren't you?"

Jeff shrugged. "All right," he said. "I'll listen. But that's all I'm going to do."

Gardiner arose from his bar stool. "I'll bring Miss Reid right over—this may be a good thing for you."

"How many kinds of damned fool do you think I am," Jeff asked. Gardiner was beginning to get under his skin. "If it's such a good thing, why aren't you in it?"

"Oh, out of my line," Gardiner replied.

"But you think I can handle it?" Jeff inquired.

"Absolutely! Just the man," Gardiner said.

"All right—I'll go fifty-fifty with you," Jeff proposed, a smile lurking at the corner of his mouth.

Gardiner cleared his throat. He'd asked for that one. "I'd love to but my funds are all tied up—no ready cash."

"There Was a Man From Galway," Jeff sang. "He kissed the Blarney Stone. . . ." Gardiner flushed and then began to chuckle. Jeff added: "Come on; you've got an angle here."

"Well, Miss Reid's father was a very dear friend of mine," Gardiner admitted. "She's crazy about this young Drake boy and I'd like to do what I could for her—"

"Yes, I know," Jeff threw back his head and roared with laughter. "Anything short of putting up money. You expect your sentiment to rule my pocketbook?"

Gardiner hurried away and returned

shortly with Miss Reid. They took a table and her hauteur melted. She was all sugar and spice and everything nice.

"I'm so sorry," she told Jeff. "I acted abominably, but I really did think you deliberately bet against me and jinxed me."

"He's got a tough hide," Gardiner remarked. "What'll you have to drink, my dear, a Daquiri?"

"Please."

He looked at Jeff, asking wryly: "Buttermilk, I presume."

Jeff laughed. "Buttermilk, of course."

"We're going to have a worse time getting it here than we did in Denver," Gardiner complained. "You and your buttermilk. How about you, Mr. Ranger?"

Jimmy looked at Jeff: "How about it, pop?"

"You may have a drink, son," Jeff grinned.

Miss Reid launched into her plea for the Coral Island racetrack. She was, Jeff grudgingly concluded, a remarkably good apologist. She had attendance statistics, trends in attendance and population and tourist trade growth and such pertinent facts at her command and used them to prove that the Tamiami area could profitably support three tracks and that the Coral Island Park was more strategically located to a wide part of the population than were the other tracks. She made Drake out to be a brilliant young business man, a victim of circumstance, a St. George fighting the dragon and, incidentally, revealed him as being a stubborn young man, who, when the original company folded up, had decided to go on alone despite the opposition of all his friends —including herself.

"He knew he was in for a terrific fight," she said. "But he's like his father there; he likes a fight." Her voice quivered a little. "The only trouble is, he's so inexperienced, particularly in this field."

Jeff heard her to the end with an occasional pertinent question. Finally she paused and looked at him hopefully. His face was expressionless.

"Miss Reid," he said, after a silence that became somewhat strained and during which her face became despairing. "I understand you have considerable of this world's goods yourself. The question is obvious."

She shrugged hopeless shoulders. "I'd let Will have every nickel of it if I could. I know this thing will be a gold mine—really. But my inheritance is in a trust fund and its not as large as one might suppose. I can't touch it."

Jeff nodded.

"I'm sorry," he said finally. "I can't see it, Miss Reid." He did feel genuinely sorry for the girl. She was on the snooty side, but she had been brought up to it. He admired her loyalty and her salesmanship. If she had anything to sell, he felt she could put it over.

"I was told you were a man who gloried in wild chances and a long shot," she said scornfully, fire in her eyes. "I must have been misinformed. You apparantly, gamble on sure shots."

Jimmy Ranger looked at Jeff in alarm. Well he knew his employer's cold tempers. Jeff only smiled, sympathetically: "I don't gamble on dead shots. Had you come to me two months ago; even a month ago—I might have considered it. But you have only seventeen days to complete the physical structure of the plant, attract sufficient horsemen to make up a card and get underway to meet your license. And

everything is against you."

Her nose tilted back. "I often heard Carson Bishop speak of you during the short time we knew him and after he joined us two weeks ago I wondered why he didn't get in touch with you when he was raising funds for us. Now I know." Her attitude would have seared a steel bulkhead.

Jeff said nothing. That was one thing he'd been wanting to know. They didn't know Carson Bishop had been in touch with him.

"May I ask why it is you and not Mr. Drake who is proposing this to me," Jeff asked.

"I'm here because Will and I aren't afraid to take a chance," she said, scornfully. "We came over to see Mr. Gardiner. Will went back after our conference. We didn't, of course, know you were here. I stayed on with twenty-five thousand dollars to try to run it up into the sum we need or enough of it to help for a week. But you wouldn't understand anything so unconservative as that, Mr. Cash Gorman."

She arose from the table, saying to Gardiner: "Thanks anyway, darling." Turning to Jeff, she said, "You may be interested to know that your friend Mr. Bishop owned ten percent of Coral Park which will go to his wife. When Will does a thing he does it right. That's his trouble; he's too honest. He probably will never get along as well as you, Mr. Gorman. He wouldn't sit by when he knew that a friend died broke and let the only thing of any possible value to that friend's family perish without a struggle."

She turned on her heel and walked away, her head high; contempt for Jeff in her every movement.

"Wait a minute," he said, jumping to his feet and running after her. "Is that on the level?"

"Why should I lie to you?"

"I don't know you," he said, coldly. "Maybe this is an act. What's Bishop's lawyer's name?"

She told him and he went to the telephone and got the man out of bed. He was reluctant to explain anything, but, finally, having known that Bishop had sent for Jeff, he admitted Dallas Reid had told the truth. All Bishop had left his family that might be worth anything was a ten percent interest in Coral Island Park.

Jeff returned to the table and sat down. "How much do you need?"

Her face lighted up as if someone had turned a switch within her. "You'll do it!" she exclaimed, jumping to her feet and leaning across the table to clench his hand. "Oh. How wonderful!"

Gardiner peered at Jeff, owlishly, over a double brandy, and half smiled. "And I thought you were tough," he murmured.

"How much do you need?" Jeff repeated.

"Two hundred thousand dollars."

"O. K.," he said. "On one condition—I get forty-five percent."

She drew back from him, wide eyed.

"Oh! But that's outrageous," she cried. "Will's put seven hundred thousand dollars into Coral Island Park."

He shrugged. "Take it or leave it. I'm risking two hundred thousand dollars on a ten thousand to one shot. If you could get it any place else you wouldn't be here."

She looked at him sullenly. "I suppose we have no other choice," she said, finally. "We'll take it; subject, of course, to confirmation from Will."

"O. K. If he gives the word. It's done."

Ranger was staring at Jeff in dazed disbelief. Finally, he kicked Jeff's leg. Leaning toward him he whispered hoarsely: "You haven't got two hundred thousand dollars."

"I know it," Jeff murmured out of the corner of his mouth. "Shut up."

CHAPTER VI.

FISH HITS BAIT.

STEAMBOAT GINNIS was unable to overhear the conference between Dallas Reid and Cash, but he was disturbed. When he saw Miss Reid all but fall upon Jeff's neck with joy, he correctly deduced that Gorman was not keeping his nose clean.

Steamboat's first reaction was simply to do away with Jeff on the spot, but, on reflection, he came to the conclusion that it would be better not to take such an active measure without first consulting headquarters. He called Nick Lias and informed him of Gorman's presence in Havana.

The owner of the Golden Pheasant received the news profanely. He looked like a huge toad as he sat behind his desk in his club headquarters, hunched forward over the telephone. "You talk with Gorman?" he asked.

"Yeah. Sure, boss. The minute I seen him I told him to keep his nose clean," Steamboat reported. As lieutenant of the active squad, in charge of strong-arm affairs, Steamboat fancied himself as a person of superior intelligence, perfectly capable of taking such measures as this on his own initiative.

"You damn fool," Lias swore. "I sent you over there to watch that dame. That was all you was supposed to do. The next time you open that big trap of yours without orders you'll wish you'd never been born."

"Well, gee, boss, you said you was goin' to meet him and tell him to keep his nose clean so when I seen him I figure he must have stopped off here for some reason like meeting this Reid dame so I just told him myself." Steamboat whined, aggrieved. "What's the matter with that?"

"You ain't me," Lias snapped. "Also, he's already been to Tamiami and been told. Hang on the wire a minute—" Lias turned to a subordinate: "Go out to the bar and get Bill Barber in here quick."

He turned his attention back to the telephone. "Did he try to pump you about our pipeline into Drake's outfit?"

"Naw, boss," Steamboat said. "He knows he couldn't pump me."

Lias bit through a cigar. "Repeat your conversation." When he had heard Steamboat through he delivered a scorching discussion in several languages on his henchman's intelligence and antecedents, concluding: "Is this guy Gardiner in the deal?"

"I don't know, boss," Steamboat replied. Anxious to atone for his errors, he added: "What do I do with Cash—shoot him?"

"Use your head, you dope," Lias said. "Get some Cuban to shoot him. You can't go around blastin' people in foreign countries."

"O. K., boss," Steamboat said.

"Don't hang up yet," Lias commanded. He explained the situation to Bill Barber, who had just entered the room.

"What d'ya mean, shoot?" Barber demanded. "You're as bad as that fathead you sent over to Havana—if it ever came out that a man was killed over

this track fight not even the politicians could help us."

"Yeah?" Lias asked. "Everybody knows Gorman carries a wad of cash around in his pocket. He gets held up by some Cuban and gets shot trying to save his bank roll. So how they gonna trace it?"

"How do we know—maybe Gorman and Gardiner are pals," Barber said. "Cash gets around. And if Gardiner got the wind up he'd call up Batista and it would be about ten minutes before the cops had the Cuban and your dope both in the can working on them. That would be that. Those guys know how to make slobs like Steamboat sing."

Lias thought this over. "I guess you're right," he said, regretfully. He spoke into the phone again: "Don't shoot Gorman. And don't talk to him. Not even about the weather."

"The weather is very nice over here," Steamboat reported.

"Aw, nuts," Lias said. "Come home on the first plane, you cluck."

"O. K.," Steamboat said, mystified. "You know, I shouldn't have missed that guy the first time I tried to blast him."

"What?" Lias exploded.

"That wasn't tonight, boss," Steamboat explained, hurriedly. "That was a long time ago in New Orleans when I was working for the Greek. Cash sits in on a dice game and the dice are hot so he runs a hot pair of his own in on the game and cleans the Greek. I'll let him go if you say so, boss, but the guy is strictly a crook. You can't trust nothin' he says."

"Well, Havana ain't no place for you with a guy like that around . . . you come home," Lias commanded his henchman. To Barber he said: "I don't like this. I think you better let me send Max Stein over there to arrange a nice little accident through some local party. This guy's got no ethics and I don't like to deal with guys like that. You never know what they're going to do."

Barber made an impatient gesture with his hand. "Keep your hat on, Nick, this calls for finesse. And Mr. J. Walter Logan has a load of it. I'll call him right up and tomorrow the wheels of justice will start grinding in the State legislature and the racing commission very soon will move the opening date for Coral Island up a week or ten days."

Lias nodded his head approvingly and his heavy-lipped mouth opened in a jagged-toothed grin. "Slick," he commented. "If the guy's not already in, he'll deal himself a toboggan right out of there; if he is already in, he's already to the cleaners. They can't finish the grandstand in a week. But I might just as well put Max to work thinkin' up a little accident in case anything goes wrong."

"Logan and I don't want any of that kind of stuff," Barber said sharply.

"Logan and you," Lias sneered. "Ain't we gettin' dandy pants these days. Maybe you think he's goin' to invite you to have tea with the four hundred or somethin'." The heavy eyelids narrowed over his piggy eyes. "You and Logan ain't tellin' me nothin'. I got a piece of that horse park of yours and I'd be protectin' it even if you didn't ask me."

CHAPTER VII.

WANTED: PARTNERS.

JEFF was having breakfast in bed. He felt that he shouldn't disturb himself by physical exertion while trying to think up means of raising the seventy-five thousand dollars he needed to make

up the two hundred thousand dollars he had promised Dallas Reid and still leave himself with a modest personal war chest. Jimmy Ranger entered his room and salaamed to the floor. "Greetings, oh, great wizard," he said. "You have put your foot in the bucket."

Jeff gazed upon his assistant with attention. "I'll be getting athlete's foot from doing that," he remarked. "What now? Another Brazil adventure?"

"Well, at least you have an option on a few hopeful rubber plants in Brazil," Jimmy said. "All you're going to have here is a beautiful skeleton on the outskirts of Coral Island as a monument to your folly—and it won't even be yours."

"Are you referring to the grandstand at Coral Island Park?" Jeff asked.

"I am. You have just seven days to get it built, including today."

"Oh-h-h!" Jeff said. "The boys are throwing the book at me."

Jimmy, it turned out, had tuned in their portable radio on a news broadcast of an American station and picked up the report that State Senator Harry Manley had announced he would immediately introduce a motion "requesting" that the State racing commission advance the opening date of the park by ten days.

"How does the legislature come in on this?" Jeff asked. Jimmy explained that the radio reporter said Senator Manley would make his recommendation move under the authority of a "general welfare" clause in the pari-mutuel law.

"The basis of the argument is that the dates for the two parks are competitive and that Flamingo has two nationally famous stake races during the last ten days, for which it puts up plenty of purse money, attracts the best horses in the country and a great many tourists; plus national publicity," Jimmy said. "According to Manley, that makes it in the interest of the general welfare of the State to protect the older institution. If the racing commissioner, a guy named Rodney Nordoff, don't see fit to change the date on recommendation, the legislature can pass a bill."

"Mr. Nordoff will probably see fit," Jeff remarked dryly. "What I can't figure out is why they ever permitted this outfit to get a license in the first place."

Jimmy reported that from what the radio reporter said the original company had moved so fast and spent so much money in the proper places that the action caught the Tamiami track owners off guard.

"A lovely situation," Jeff remarked. "Has brother Nordoff, the racing commissioner, got a wife?"

"How do I know?" Jimmy asked. "Why?"

"Because if he has, she isn't going to like me," Jeff replied. "Get me Roberta Lane on the telephone."

BUT Jeff," Roberta Lane protested. "My business here is just beginning to go good. I can't leave New York now—"

"Who put you in the dress shoppe business?" Jeff inquired, practically. "Not to mention who kept you out of the hoosegow in Denver. This little trip is on me—including clothes. Bring plenty and the slinkier they are the better. Fly down tonight. Take a suite at the King Neptune Hotel. You're a divorcee from Frisco with a million bucks and a friend of Miss Dallas Reid. You're thinking of investing important money in the Coral Island Racetrack and you go to see Mr. Rodney Nordoff, the State racing commissioner, to ask

him, confidentially, for advice. He will tell you that you would be crazy to put up a nickel and you will be so grateful to Roddie that he certainly will ask you to have dinner. From there on, darling; you're on your own. What I want to know is what's with the racing commission from day to day regarding the Coral Island track."

"O. K., lamb, I'll be down tomorrow," said Bobbie, who had light-brown hair, large gray eyes and adequate essential points below the neck. Stranded in Hollywood, she had taken a job which turned out to be with a swindler, but by the time she was aware of the fact she was in up to her neck. She had met Jeff in Denver where her confederates attempted to run a fast one on Cash. "From what I hear, you've got a beautiful turkey on your hands."

"I'll save you a slice of white meat," Jeff replied.

Jimmy looked at him sourly. "Where are you going to get this seventy-five thousand dollars we need?" he asked. Jeff waved his finger in the air, replying: "Never fear. I have a plan."

"Nuts," said Jimmy. He knew that if Jeff had a plan he'd be informed of it.

"Why worry?" Jeff asked. "We don't need the money until tomorrow. . . . Tell Miss Dallas Reid to come here, will you? Invite her politely, of course."

Miss Reid's hazel eyes snapped and her red hair seemed to grow redder as she looked at Jeff, who was still in bed. She was, he reflected, extremely beautiful. It was too bad she was so spoiled.

"Do you always receive in bed?" she asked, coldly.

"Not 'in' bed, exactly," Jeff corrected her. "From bed. What did Mr. Wilbur Drake have to say about my offer to put up two hundred thousand dollars for forty-five percent of the track?"

"Unfortunately, we have no choice," she said, making no bones of the fact that she looked upon Jeff as practically an extortionist.

"Unfortunately, you're right." Jeff smiled pleasantly. "Now trot right back to the telephone, my dear, and tell him that, in view of the new circumstances, I will have to have a ten percent larger interest." Jeff smiled pleasantly at her surprise, "Tell me, was it your idea or his to withhold information as to what Manley is planning to do in the legislature?"

She bit her lip and had the grace to blush. "Mine," she admitted. "I was afraid you'd back out without even going to Tamiami. Will wanted to tell you. He's too honest."

Jeff grinned: "Don't hold out on me. You'll just ball us all up, and let me know what he says about the other ten percent so I'll know whether to make plane reservations."

"But that will give you control," she cried. "You can't do that. . . . I wish I'd never met you! I'd rather see Will go broke rather than have you wind up with the whole track after all he's done—"

Jeff held up a soothing hand. "With Mrs. Carson Bishop's interest, I have control, anyway," he pointed out. "From what you told me of the progress to date, it's going to cost more money than the figure stipulated to finish the work in seven days. What difference does it make to Drake how much money I make so long as he gets his investment back? I'm the sucker for even getting mixed up in this."

Dallas Reid made her exit with an angry swish of short silk skirt that attracted Jimmy Ranger's undivided at-

Lias sneered: "And I thought you was a smart guy," he said sarcastically. Then he rose with almost incredible speed, for such a great hulk of a man, sending the chair flying over behind him as Jeff continued to eye him calmly.

tention. "You're kind of rough on her," he remarked.

"She has an idea the world was ordered for her particular pleasure," Jeff replied, jumping out of bed. "Everybody has to find out about the facts of life sooner or later. Get the porter on the telephone. Make two reservations on the last plane today. Then run out to the airport and charter a private plane to run us over to Tamiami."

Jimmy was startled: "You think we're being watched."

Jeff shrugged. "How do we know? Anyway, I want to pay a private call in Tamiami, via the back door."

"To get the seventy-five thousand fish?" Jimmy asked.

Jeff nodded.

"Who's the sucker?"

"Mr. Nick Lias—the eminent muscle and murder man."

CHAPTER VIII.

NO DICE.

JEFF looked around the elaborately laid out Bahaman Club and tapped Steamboat Ginnis on the shoulder. "Nice little place Lias has here," he remarked.

Steamboat jumped and whirled around, his hand darting into the coat of his double-breasted dinner jacket. Jimmy Ranger bumped him against the bar with a shove of his massive shoulder.

"This is a sociable call, guy," he snapped. "Tell your boss, Cash Gorman wants to see him."

"Tell him that Mr. Thomas Jefferson Gorman wants to see him," Jeff corrected. "You must be eating too much fancy food, Steamboat; makes you nervous."

"I got a good mind—" Steamboat began. Remembering his instructions with regard to conversation, he closed his mouth and made off in silence for the rear of the club from whence he presently beckoned to Jeff. "Leave your protection outside," he said, jerking his head toward Jimmy. Jeff brushed him aside. "My associate, Mr. Ranger, always accompanies me on missions of a delicate nature."

Lias' face was expressionless as he greeted Jeff with a curt nod. "I said I'd see you alone," he remarked, pointedly.

Jeff looked around the room. "See if there's anything behind that curtain, Jimmy," he directed, nodding toward a heavy velvet window drape over a huge window that looked out on the sea. Jimmy investigated and shook his head.

"All right, Jeff said. "Wait outside."

He seated himself and inspected Lias, who was observing him inscrutably through his piggy eyes.

"I understand you have things pretty well organized around here," Jeff said. "Rackets, unions and such."

Lias said nothing. His obese figure was immobile. He just sat and stared.

"It's general knowledge you have a piece in Tamiami Park," Jeff continued. "That explains your interest in this affair."

Not so much as a muscle on Lias' fat, sinister face moved. He didn't answer.

"In other words," Jeff said, "you're no fool; you figure all the angles."

"So you're a smart guy, too," Lias said, his voice was coarse and heavy. "Get down to it."

"I'm arriving in Tamiami tonight on the last Clipper from Havana," Jeff said. "Except for Steamboat Ginnis, nobody knows I'm here, besides you."

Lias nodded.

"I have fifty-five percent of Coral Island," Jeff said, which was not exactly true, but he had no doubt but that he would have fifty-five percent before the day was over. "Now when we get it open there is a chance that it will go over. However, even if it doesn't—it has a million-and-a-half-dollar nuisance value to the two other tracks."

Lias spoke flatly. "You ain't going to open."

"Are you always right?" Jeff inquired pleasantly.

Lias shrugged his heavy shoulders. "I been wrong—but not often."

"Me neither," Jeff said. "I have a proposition to make you."

Lias nodded. "Keep talking. I like to listen to smooth guys."

"I'll deal you in for twenty percent of the track for seventy-five thousand dollars," Jeff said, sinking back in his chair and regarding Lias quizzically. "No matter which way the dice fall you can't lose."

Lias' inscrutable look dropped away from him to be replaced by open-mouthed astonishment. "What do'ya think I am—a sap?" he demanded.

"I hope not," Jeff said. "If you're not, you'll take me up."

Lias sneered: "And I thought you was a smart guy," he said, sarcastically. "You think you can buy me off so I'll play your game. And make me pay for it to boot." He rose with incredible speed for such a great hulk of a man, sending his chair flying out behind him. "Get out of here, sucker. Scram. You ain't opening no track, see? And if you know what's good for you, you'll go back to Cuba and spend your time playin' post office with them dames. Get out."

Jeff climbed to his feet in leisurely fashion. "My! I'm scared." He shrugged his shoulders. "Better think it over, Lias. You're just throwing away a piece of pie."

A burly, pug-nosed man entered the room through a rear door, his hand in his coat. "Anything the matter, boss?" he asked, staring from Jeff to the overturned chair.

"Throw this bum out," Lias said.

"Move buddie," the thug commanded. Jeff moved.

Lias watched him go, his face once more a mask, and then pressed the inter-office communication box lever down and said: "Send Maxie Stein in here." The man who answered this command was short, sharp faced, slim and dapper. "Hello, Nick—what's up?"

"See that guy who just left here?" Lias asked. Stein nodded. "His name's Gorman—Thomas Jefferson Gorman. Call him Cash."

Stein nodded; his eyes brightening with interest. "I've heard of him."

"He's going back to Havana and coming over again on the last plane. Stayin' at the Hotel Nacional. How's your connections in Cuba?"

Stein reported that his connections were excellent.

"O. K.," Lias grunted. "Pick up that chair for me." Stein recovered the chair and shoved it up for Lias to sit in. "So?" he asked.

"Gorman ain't comin' to Tamiami tonight, is he?" Lias asked.

"No," Stein said. He smiled. "He's not going any place. Maybe he don't feel so good tonight."

JIMMY RANGER looked at Jeff sarcastically. "Well, you certainly didn't lose any time raising the seventy-five thousand dollars," he remarked.

"Spare me your caustic cracks, Mr. Ranger," Jeff said. He took his hat from the check girl and examined her with an appreciative eye. Blonde, but ash blonde; black nail polish, clothes that hid not one of a plentitude of curves, a perfect hair-do and wise eyes. She would, Jeff decided, slit her grandmother's throat if she thought there was anything worthwhile in the idea.

"You got a friend?" he asked, casually taking a roll of bills from his pocket thick enough to choke a mastiff. Standing with his back to the remainder of the club so that his body hid the money, he fanned the crisp bills open, disclosing twenty hundred-dollar notes, two five-hundred and two one-thousands.

She blinked at the money. "Why worry about my friends?" she asked. "What's the matter with me?"

Jeff nodded toward Jimmy.

"Oh, sure—for *him?* O. K.," she said. "My girl friend works here, but she gets off at midnight."

Jeff slid a hundred-dollar bill to her under his hat and told her who he was. "I just bought an interest in Coral Island Racetrack," he explained. "Keep your ears open and slip me an unsigned note any time you hear anything important around here. There will be three of these for every worthwhile item of information about what Lias is planning to do. I'll be at the Neptune." He didn't wait for her to say yes or no.

Jimmy looked at him in disgust. "What can hat check girls find out?" he asked.

Jeff shook his head sadly. "You don't think a girl like her works around a place like that without having a few 'acquaintances' among the 'staff' do you?" He shrugged his shoulders. "And if I'm wrong we're out a hundred dollars. It's worth a bet.

CHAPTER IX.

TRICKS OF THE TRADE.

JIMMY RANGER climbed out of the cab at the airport. "Personally, I don't see what we're going back to Havana for," he remarked sourly.

"I'm not going back," Jeff said. "Just you. I'm going to the Neptune Hotel and sit in the lobby."

"Why?" Jimmy wanted to know.

"Oh, I just have an idea that if I sit there long enough somebody will walk up and say, 'Do you want seventy-five thousand dollars?'" Jeff said. "Anyway, you couldn't pay me to go back to Havana. My new friend, Mr. Lias, thinks I'm going to Havana and for some reason I distrust Mr. Lias. Maybe he has friends in Havana and my distrust extends even to his friends. Be careful of yourself and see that Dallas Reid comes home without wasting any more money at the Casino trying to lift the mortgage on the old homestead before it falls into my clutches. We may need her dough."

At the Neptune Hotel Jeff registered and then proceeded to sit in the lobby. He sat on a spacious couch in a dark corner and strained his eyesight reading a newspaper. An hour passed and then someone sat down beside him. Jeff looked casually around the corner of his paper and was not very much surprised to see Bill Barber.

"Fancy seeing you here, Bill," he remarked pleasantly to the owner of Tamiami Park.

"Thought you were in Havana," Barber said, folding his plump hands across his small bay window and twirling his thumbs. His pink, bald head glistened. He smiled amiably and his eyes held a merry twinkle. Jeff knew the signs. Mr. Barber was interested in larceny.

"I thought your friend Lias would tell you I was in Havana," Jeff said. "Thanks for being so prompt."

Barber grinned. "Yeah; I came right over," he said. "I got a hotel, you know. Why do you always stay at this joint?"

"So people can find me," Jeff replied.

"They could find you at my joint," Barber said. "What's all this about seventy-five thousand dollars for a one-fifth cut in Coral Island?"

Jeff pretended to be greatly surprised. "Mr. Lias is a regular Charlie McCarthy, isn't he?"

Barber looked even more amiable. "Stow that stuff. You knew he'd call me and I know you went to him because you're afraid of that strong-arm angle and wanted to suck him in so he'd take it easy on you. But maybe you need the dough, too. So I came around to talk."

Jeff admitted that he needed the money and said he could get it elsewhere, but he didn't think he could make as good a deal as he could right on the Neptune couch. "Of course, I would have preferred to deal with brother Lias. Owning a piece of two horse parks might confuse him to the extent of paralysis," Jeff remarked, wistfully. "However, as long as you're here there's no reason I shouldn't make you rich."

"Oh, sure. Thanks Jeff. And if Coral Island Park goes over with the public, my investment in Tamiami Park is washed out," Barber replied pleasantly. "That's not good. And that's why you're not going to open."

"Don't be too sure," Jeff said.

"I been layin' bets off all my life," Barber remarked. "There's no reason why I should stop now—what if you open and it's a flop?"

Jeff leaned forward and tapped Barber's knee. "That's what I expect, but even so it will still be worth a million and a half dollars to Tamiami and Flamingo to have us closed for good because as long as we open every season we can keep our license and we'll be drawing customers away from you and Mr. J. Walter Logan. Coral Island Park might even be worth two million dollars from the nuisance abatement standpoint if one of the two men who negotiated the purchase was also quietly interested in getting a good price for the property on sale." Jeff looked innocently at the ceiling. "Of course, you wouldn't be interested in extracting a pound or two of flesh from Mr. Logan."

"Right where he sits," Bill Barber declared. "I'm still listening."

Jeff quickly outlined the proposition, which was based on the fact that Tamiami Park netted approximately $250,000 per season against $600,000 for Flamingo Park. Thus if Coral Island Park was opened and the two other parks joined to buy it and close it permanently, the ratio of the sales price to be born would be roughly twenty-five-sixty. The asking price for Coral Island Park would be $2,500,000. An offer of $1,500,000 would be acceptable. Tamiami Park's share of this sale price would amount, roughly, to $66,500 per year over a seven-year period, interest included, out of a total yearly installment of $220,000. Bill Barber, as owner of approximately half of the Tamiami property, would bear personally about $33,250 of the purchase price out of his Tamiami earnings. His yield as a twenty percent owner of the Coral Island Park track, on the other side of the transaction, would just about balance the $75,000 which Jeff wished him to pay for the one-fifth share.

"So far I'm following you," Barber said, reflectively rubbing his bald head. "There must be more."

"Absolutely," Jeff smiled. "With the purchase of a twenty percent interest direct from me you get an option to buy my remaining thirty-five percent for a cash price of $375,000—the option to become effective three days after the opening of the park or any time thereafter in the event it would be more to your advantage not to have your ownership known. It will, of course, carry a provision that you cannot close the park without the permission of Drake. Now, if the park were sold for $1,500,000, my thirty-five percent would be worth $525,000 over the seven-year period or whatever period was determined upon. I also control ten percent belonging to Mrs. Bishop which would go in at a flat price of $100,000."

There was nothing which appealed to Bill Barber so much as a possible profit of $225,000 on a $75,000 investment. "Talk on," he said.

"Well, with you operating as one of the purchasers and myself as the seller, it's possible that we might be able to reach a sale price of $2,000,000," Jeff pointed out. "In such a case I would collect an additional twenty percent on my former thirty-five percent holding in excess of its $525,000 value under a $1,500,000 sale price and the rest would go to you. Same terms on Mrs. Bishop's ten percent. And your own partners in Tamiami together with Mr. J. Walter Logan would be paying the freight—principally Mr. Logan. You *could* make over a half million."

Barber's thumbs twirled like a propeller operating under forced draft. "All right," he said finally. "It's a bet. Draw up the papers, but put the whole transaction on an option basis. I don't want to appear in this thing until the sale is already completed." He looked at Jeff with a kindly expression, as if about to bestow a benediction upon him. "Of course, you realize that if you don't open, I'd make about the same amount of money as I would if you did open and the park were sold for $1,500,000; which is all I think the traffic would bear. So I'm going to see that you stay closed. It's safer. However, $75,000 is cheap insurance against any accidents."

"I thought you'd see it in a logical light," Jeff said. He sighed. "Seems all I do is give you money."

Barber chuckled happily. "You got no complaints. For all the good this will do me, I might just as well chuck that seventy-five grand in the sewer," he said, turning his round blue eyes on Jeff innocently. "What's this Wall Street guy, Gardiner, got to do with your deal?"

"Why he's a friend of Miss Dallas Reid's father and I hooked him for just enough to get his feet wet," Jeff lied. "He's my ace in the hole if I need more dough. He'll want to protect his investment."

This thought didn't seem to please Barber. "Well, keep your life insurance paid up," he remarked, arising. "Me, I never know what my left hand is doing and some of my associates are inclined to be impetuous."

CHAPTER X.

LABOR UNREST.

IT WAS late afternoon when Jeff reached Coral City and located the racetrack. It was on the inland side of the sea drive on the mainland portion of the winter resort just north of Tamiami.

"Got a card?" the watchman asked Jeff, who had, in the meantime, been to the First City Bank of Tamiami to arrange a transfer of funds from New York and draw money, being known at the bank.

"What's going on here?" he asked the gateman, looking around in amazement. Trucks, machinery of all kinds and men were idle; the latter grouped in small cliques from which the hum of morose conversation arose. There was no sound of riveting from the modernistic three-quarters-completed steel grandstand. Gardeners were leaning on their spades. The grading equipment on the track itself was bunched in a knot with the men loafing about it, talking.

"Guess they're havin' some more trouble," the gateman drawled. "Sub-contractors got to have more money for night work to finish in time and it looks like Drake can't get it up." Recalling himself to his duties, he asked: "Say, who are you? What do you want around here?"

Jeff put the car he had just bought into gear and said: "I'm Mr. Gorman. I'm thinking of investing in this property."

The gateman stepped respectfully backward and waved Jeff on, but it was apparent from the expression on his face that he considered himself in the presence of a nut on the bolt.

Jeff parked the car beside an idle cement mixer and got out, addressing a Negro laborer. "Know where Mr. Drake is?"

The man jerked his thumb over his shoulder: "Over there with the bosses." The group which he indicated was composed of ten or twelve men. Sounds of animated argument could be heard.

"Thanks," Jeff said. He started to move on and then stopped again. "This job all union?" he asked. The group of workmen looked him over slowly, suspicion in their eyes.

"Yeah," a hard-eyed cracker drawled finally. There was hostility in his voice as he added: "What are you, another *delegate* from the Bronx?"

Jeff's quick eyes ran around the circle of men before him and sized up the situation immediately as he noticed them inspecting him, his clothes, and his car with expressions that ranged from sullenness to open antagonism. They had jumped to the conclusion that he was one of Lias' union racketeers.

"No," he said. He flashed a quick smile at them. "My name's Gorman—Thomas Jefferson Gorman. I'm going to put enough money into this proposition to keep it alive and keep everybody working a little longer providing I can get a fair shake all around—and that goes for labor, too."

Wanting no discussion without more adequate knowledge, he strode swiftly toward the second group. In the center of the excitedly gesticulating circle was a harried looking young man whom Jeff took to be about twenty-seven although at present he looked a good deal older than Jeff himself. He was six feet two, heavy-shouldered with short-cropped brown hair, wide-spaced, honest blue eyes and a square jaw.

"You're not giving me a fair deal on this," Wilbur Drake said grimly. It was apparent his temper was on the ragged edge. "I've played square with all of you. All along you've been boosting costs over contract agreements because of the emergencies that have come up from time to time. You knew I was under pressure and couldn't afford delays. You know what I'm up against and now you're trying to stab me in the back. If I hadn't gone on with this

job you'd have all been up the creek."

Jeff saw signs of serious trouble brewing. Pushing quickly through the crowd, he grasped Drake's hand. "Cash Gorman," he introduced himself. "Where can we talk?"

Drake stared at him blankly for a moment and then five years of worried lines seemed to smooth out on his face. He pumped Jeff's hand and grinned delightedly. "Boy, I'm glad to see you," he said. "Come on over here by this truck."

A burly man in riding breeches barred their progress. "Come on," he said, a scowl on his heavy, broken-nosed face. "What are ya gonna do about this? We ain't got time to wait around here all day. The men's waiting for word whether they come to work tomorrow or not."

Drake started to explain the new circumstances, but Jeff cut him short. This was the kind of man who foisted himself off as a leader on those of uncertain minds and Jeff pegged him for the kingpin trouble maker. He tapped a long finger on the man's chest.

"Just control your impatience for a few minutes, mister," he said, staring into the other man's eyes with a flint-hard expression. "Have a nice cool drink of water and think about how much more money can be made when everybody co-operates."

"Who are you, wise guy?" the subcontractor asked.

"I'm the bank roll," Jeff said. He brushed past the man and made his way over to a parked truck at some distance from the startled group. "Who's that?"

"Big Bill Meggs—laying the concrete," Drake said. He was a very tired-looking young man. "He works hand in glove with Lias and he's been high-jacking me right along. Nothing I can do about it. They've got everything sewed up, including labor, and the others look to him for their cues." He looked Jeff over. "I thought you were still in Havana."

"No, I came over by chartered plane to do a little prospecting," Jeff said. "How's for that extra ten percent?"

Drake laughed, but there wasn't much humor in it. "What can I do?" he asked, adding quickly: "I'm not complaining. You're taking a long shot."

"I haven't taken it yet," Jeff pointed out. "We haven't signed anything."

"Oh!" Drake's shoulders sagged despondently. "Dallas said you were a pirate and I was hopeful you'd take a hand. If there's anything I need around here besides money it's a good pirate."

"What's the situation here?" Jeff asked.

"Well, we've been cut down to seven days by Logan and his crowd. He's got the legislature and the racing commission in his pocket, so that will go through. I have to put lights in here for night work. The electrical contractor I've been dealing with wants twenty thousand dollars for a ten-thousand job—the equipment is stuff that can be rented. And all the rest of them jerking up their figures out of all reason, saying they'll have to pay their men time and a half for night work and their own expenses will be almost doubled if we're going to get through. Altogether it will mean about $125,000 more and when I quoted money to you I only left myself about $50,000 leeway for emergencies."

Jeff slapped him on the back. All things considered Drake was bearing up solidly under a back-breaking situation. "Don't give up the ship," he said. "If I go in on this and we put it over; you'll get your money out. If we don't

put it over—we'll both be broke." He asked a few more questions and then returned to the contractors and supply men; now about twenty in number.

Jeff took up a position beside Drake in front of them. "I'll do all the talking," he told Drake out of the corner of his mouth. Aloud, he introduced himself to the attentive group, silent now. "I'm Thomas Jefferson Gorman. I plan to invest in this track."

Meggs broke in on him. "I never heard of you," he sneered. "What's the color of your money?"

"This color," Jeff said. From his pocket he took a fold of new bills. Like a magician fanning a deck of cards, he spread the bills in his hand and held them up in Meggs' face. Each was one thousand dollars.

JEFF's eyes swept the startled faces before him and he had a difficult time suppressing a grin. They looked as if he had produced an elephant from his hat. "That's one hundred thousand dollars, Mr. Meggs," he said, addressing the Lias man directly. "There's more where this came from. Money will not be one of our troubles at Coral Island Park henceforth—providing I take a hand."

His glance swept them all. A circle of workmen had gathered around the smaller group and Jeff raised his voice. "However, I'm not putting up a nickel unless I'm satisfied with the terms you men make. I'm no sucker. I'm considering this venture only because I can see possibility of profit in it. If I don't put up the money, this job is ended tonight. Drake is broke. He'll have to go into bankruptcy. All of you have been making him pay cash on the barrel head, but you do have contracts covering the completion of the work. You'll never get a nickel on them. You'll all be out thousands of dollars that you could have had and your men will be out of work. That leaves it up to you. If a dirty rat like Lias has you so buffaloed that you'll sabotage a job and throw your own profits away, just tell me and we'll call it all off."

There was an uncertain murmur of conversation. They had always managed to impose their demands on Drake by the threat to stop work. In the present instance they had considered him broke anyway. This changed the situation. Lias had been helping them make more money, but now they stood to lose money through him.

Meggs spoke up angrily. "We can't cut our demands. The men want time and a half for night work."

Jeff laughed. "In the middle of winter—the slack building season—you can't fill out three shifts? If that's your contention, Meggs, you're a liar. Nobody has to work overtime. And a thousand men who need the jobs will get straight pay and be glad to have it.

Meggs flushed and moved threateningly. So did Jeff. Nothing happened.

"That's what you think," he said finally. "If they don't get paid time and a half for night work, they won't work and the men on the job will strike."

Jeff stared him down. "You seem to know a lot about what men will do when there's only a week of work left and they know the job will fall through if they strike. And I don't ever remember hearing of time and a half for night work unless it was overtime."

Meggs sneered. "You're hearing about it now."

Jeff took a quick look at the men surrounding them in an outer circle. They looked mad.

"I'll take a chance on the men, even if Lias does have their unions tied up. There's a Lias man here by the name of Steamboat Ginnis who is considered very tough. He runs the strong-arm squad. He has a slightly broken nose; just like yours, Meggs. I gave it to him when he tried to shoot me in New Orleans. Maybe you read about a man named Steel who got the death sentence in Denver for a murder in connection with a helium swindle a few months ago. He has me to thank for that and I took $165,000 away from him perfectly legally in the bargain. I've bucked Imperial wild-catting oil in South America and come out all right. Six months ago I sold a shipload of Japanese machine guns to the Chinese and delivered the guns. Lias doesn't frighten me at all. I've dealt with people who not only are hard, but smart. He's not smart. You can tell him that tonight—"

Meggs raised a fist. "What do you mean by that?"

Jeff ignored him. "You men have the choice. I'll pay you a flat fifteen percent over present contract to make up the special effort you'll have to put into this to complete the park in time. And I'll hold myself responsible for the labor situation. If anything happens there, you get paid, anyway. The money will be posted at the First City Bank. You can do this job. I can take care of Lias. Us cracker boys like to get along peacefully with folks, but when we get tough we get awful tough. What do you say? Do we pitch?"

A lean, leathery-faced man in the middle of the group spoke up with a wide smile. "You a cracker, Mr. Gorman?"

"You bet," Jeff said. "Born in Pensacola." This was not an actual falsehood. He had been born in Pensacola while a freighter his father commanded was docked there. It had its effect, however. They had been impressed and now they were swinging around to a more friendly attitude.

"Ah'm with you," the man who had questioned him said. There was quick assent from the others.

"Where is the electrical man?" Jeff asked.

A cocky little man spoke up. "That's me." He was about to say more, but Jeff interrupted him. "I'll give you twelve thousand dollars for that job. And the lights have to be up tomorrow. Cash on the barrel head. Otherwise, I'll have my assistant take care of it, working through the power and light company. You don't have to have a license to rent equipment from people and there are plenty of union electricians to put it up. My man's an engineer. Take it or leave it."

The little man laughed and shrugged his shoulders. "I'll take it. I'm no sucker either."

Jeff turned on Meggs. "Well?"

"There's going to be trouble and I don't like it," Meggs growled. "I can't make any money your way and I don't like to be shoved around."

"If you're dealing yourself out, I'll have another outfit on the job if I have to send to Jacksonville for it and bring it down on a special train tonight," Jeff said. "And I'll sue you to boot."

Meggs hesitated. The other men were united against him and the faces of the workers who were crowding constantly closer were angry. Also, there was nothing to be gained by dropping out. "O. K., but don't say I didn't warn you," he replied.

"We'll put that in writing," Jeff said. "Now—just so you don't change your mind over night. By the way, does

Lias own a piece of your company?"

Meggs charged him with bull-like ferocity, swinging a right at Jeff's jaw. Jeff caught his arm and threw Meggs over his back with a flying mare, jarring the big man's wind out of him.

"Are you pulling out now?" Jeff asked contemptuously as Meggs climbed to his feet, swearing hoarsely.

"Why should I throw good dough away if you're sucker enough to post the contract payoff for a track that won't open?" Meggs said. "And don't think you're getting away with anything with me."

"Taking up your statements in order," Jeff said, grinning, "First, the track *is* going to open. Second, all I want out of you is concrete. And I mean concrete. And no monkey business!"

"Thanks," Drake said softly as they made for the office. "You do know your way around, don't you?"

Jeff chuckled. "All that blarney about my personal invincibility was just to needle a little confidence into that bunch. They'd probably like to see Lias in a knock-down and drag-out battle with him getting knocked down and dragged out, but they may be sorry tomorrow that they spoke up. However, we'll have them committed to it in black and white by that time. I learned at the bank that Lias has tremendous weight in the construction business due to his union and local political influence. The contractors don't like him, but they're scared of him." Jeff laughed. "I'm scared of him myself."

CHAPTER XI.

A LEAK.

DRAKE and Cash were still talking, consulting books and papers, when the swift tropical night closed in on Coral Island Park. Jeff stretched and yawned over a mass of statistics before him and then asked, sotto voce:

"Has everyone gone now?"

Drake nodded, alarmed: "Just the office watchman; he's out in front. Is something wrong?"

"You wern't aware of the fact that there's a leak some place in this organization?" Jeff asked. This boy was certainly a babe in the woods. "Must be in this office."

"How do you know?" Drake asked. "The bookkeeper was with my father's firm; Miss Stearn, my secretary, came down here from Chicago for me and I'd trust her with any information we have."

"Well, start mistrusting her right now," Jeff said. "Mistrust everybody, including me." He shoved the statistical data back and said: "Let's make a list of persons here who have access to private papers." The list boiled down again to the bookkeeper, Jason Krute, and Miss Stearn.

Jeff shrugged. "Must be one of them. Somebody around here recently knew two things that were very important and which were kept very confidential. One was the reason for your trip to Havana to see Gardiner. Lias, Barber and Logan knew you were going over after money as soon as you did."

Drake stared at him: "How do you know?"

"A man was sent over to watch you, for one thing; Steamboat Ginnis," Jeff replied. "When you went home, he stayed on to watch Dallas."

Drake jumped up from his chair, his face flushed and fists clenched. "What do they mean by dragging her into this?"

Jeff waved him impatiently to a chair. "If you don't want her in this

you'd better send her home," he said. "There's a more important reason than that, however. After I told Miss Reid I'd come in on this thing last night, Gardiner took me aside and warned me against Walter Logan. He said that before you even arrived in Havana, he had a phone call from Logan advising him against investing in this property. In other words, while you were on your way to the plane, Logan, Barber and Lias were not only aware of your destination but were spiking your guns in advance—or trying to, anyway."

Drake slumped in his chair. "I thought I could trust those two people implicitly. What was the other leak?"

Jeff smiled. "The reason I was coming here. Not even you knew it, but Carson Bishop sent for me. He told me to come and bring my bank roll. Barber and Lias had a little reception committee all prepared for me."

"How come?" Drake was all at sea. Jeff explained about Carson's cable asking him to come and bring his bank roll; and his own reply. "And you say Miss Stearn was handling his secretarial work in addition to yours?"

"Yes," Drake said reluctantly. "However, he kept very few of his papers here; there was practically nothing of importance in his desk the next morning and he told me he preferred to work from home."

Jeff picked up the telephone and called Mrs. Bishop, and he asked her about the cable.

"I wrote that cable out for him, Jeff, and sent it off," she said. "I always did his confidential work when he was at home."

"There's been a leak of some kind," Jeff said. She was unable to help him and he hung up the receiver in bewilderment. "It must be in this office, Will; he must have told somebody."

Drake laughed. "He never told anybody anything; I never saw a more silent man."

Suddenly aware of the darkness outside, Jeff started. "Good-night—the plane's been in for hours."

Drake said he had arranged to have friends of his meet Dallas Reid. "Dr. McMitchell and his wife, Aine. Your man is probably with them."

"It's funny he hasn't reported to me," Jeff said. "Wouldn't Miss Reid ordinarily have called you up by this time?"

"No. I told Fred and Aine to explain that I was busy and that I'd see her later at the hotel," Drake replied.

"O. K. Well, there's still this leak—" Jeff broke off and looked at Drake. "Dr. Fred McMitchell—say, who is he? That name seems familiar, but I can't place it."

"He's the dentist who was working on poor Bishop when he suffered that heart attack," Drake explained. Rushing hurriedly to the defense of McMitchell's professional standing, he added, "Terrible thing. He would never have administered gas except that Bishop told him his heart was as strong as a bull's; which it always had been according to his doctor. Terrible thing. Poor Fred was all broken up."

It turned out that McMitchell's wife, Aine, and Dallas Reid had been close friends in school, which was how McMitchell and Drake had become acquainted.

"He's been a good friend," Drake said. "Everyone else either laughed at me or called me a damn fool or tried to play me for what they could get, but he's been standing by very sympathetically. He's really been a godsend to me. It's a good thing to have some-

body you can trust around so you can cry on their shoulder once in a while."

"Mrs. McMitchell and Dallas see a lot of each other I take it?" Jeff asked, somewhat dryly. Drake nodded.

"I'd like to ask you not to discuss the more important decisions we make with Miss Reid," Jeff said, finally. He saw this was not making a hit. "She might talk with Mrs. McMitchell and if four people know your plans, without anyone intending to give you away, those plans are no longer confidential. Things like that are just peculiarities of mine and I'll have to ask you to put up with them. I don't even like people to know what I eat for breakfast." The telephone interrupted them. It was Mrs. Bishop.

"Jeff, I knew you wouldn't have asked me about that cable if it wasn't important," she said. "I've been thinking about it. There was one other person who knew about it. Fred McMitchell. Just four or five days ago at dinner he asked Carson why he didn't get in touch with you if he was trying to raise money. Carson told him you were already on your way here."

Jeff's eyes were knife sharp as he received this information. "How did McMitchell know anything about me?" he asked.

"He said he'd heard about you among gamblers and then, I guess, possibly Carson himself had mentioned you to him. At least, he knew you and Carson were friends," she replied. Jeff asked if McMitchell gambled much and was told he was quite interested in horses.

Jeff explained this conversation to Drake. "There's your leak," he said.

"Ridiculous," Drake exclaimed. "What cause would he have to be interested in this except as my friend? And Bishop's of course?"

Jeff shrugged: "That's what I'd like to know."

It was also what Jimmy Ranger wanted to know. "You should have heard that guy pumping Dallas Reid," he said in disgust. "I couldn't shut her up. She babbles like a brook to McMitchell and his wife."

Jeff suddenly looked worried. "Did Mr. Drake's beloved say anything about Gardiner."

"Anything?" Jimmy asked. "She detailed his every move. She also jumped on him with both feet for not having put the money they need up himself."

Jeff closed his eyes, seeing a painful vision of Bill Barber's face when he heard that Gardiner was not in the company in direct refutation of what Jeff had told him. That was not good because he didn't have Barber's money as yet. "I can see that Miss Dallas Reid is going to be a big help to us." He paced the floor for a few minutes, finally telling Jimmy: "Call Jack Barnes and have him send a couple of those private dicks of his down here from New York. Tell him to come himself if he can. I want to know all there is to know about Dr. McMitchell in a hurry."

CHAPTER XII.

ACCIDENT C. O. D. FOR CASH.

WHEN THEY had polished off a couple of steaks, the first food they had eaten since morning, Jeff dispatched Jimmy to rescue their new automobile and he took advantage of the interlude to sum up the situation. Settling down at the desk in his room, he removed his "log" book from his brief case and began "charting his course" under a new entry entitled "racetrack."

Noting down all the information at his disposal and the probable conclusions to be drawn from it, he sighed.

"Wow!" he said aloud. "I've been in some tight financial jams before, but this is tops." He rattled the change in his pocket and idly drew out a silver dollar, flipping it into the air, slapping it on his wrist. "I'll be lucky if I get out with one of these."

A rasping voice spoke out behind him: "You'll be lucky if you get out. Period."

Jeff sat perfectly still, the silver dollar still balanced on his left wrist. He had been so deep in concentration that he had not heard anyone enter the room. "And to whom do I owe the pleasure of this visit?" he asked, without turning in his chair.

"You can turn around—just keep your other hand out in front of you," he was informed. Extending his right hand palm upwards he turned and found himself facing Steamboat Ginnis and the small, foppishly-dressed man with the sharp features who had been with Lias at the airport that morning.

"Nice of you boys to call," Jeff said, pleasantly. He looked down the barrels of two automatics. "Do you mind putting that hardware away? You really don't need it. I never carry weapons, you know, Steamboat, and they always make me nervous."

"Yeah, we do mind," Steamboat said, unco-operatively. "Your nerve trouble is going to be all over soon, pal. We hear you deal yourself in on that race-track?"

"So?" Jeff asked. "Well, you know how these rumors get around." He wanted to stall for time. Jimmy couldn't be gone for very long unless the police had picked the car up. "You didn't walk through that locked door, did you?"

"Naw," Steamboat replied. "We just got a passkey. What's that you was writin' there?" He waved the gun towards Jeff's log book.

"A letter to my girl," Jeff replied blandly. He jerked his head toward the small man. "Whose your friend?"

"Max Stein," Steamboat said. He grinned broadly. "He arranges accidents. You're goin' to have one!"

"Sounds very unpleasant," Jeff remarked. He maintained an unperturbed attitude but it took all his will power. Steamboat was pure gorilla at heart and Stein's super-wise face was one which obviously had looked upon murder before. "Don't you know there's a law against pre-arranged accidents?"

"Nick Lias is runnin' the law in these parts," Steamboat remarked. "Besides, when a guy falls down in the bath tub takin' a shower and hits his head on the faucet it's wrote off as an accident. Get your clothes off."

"You don't think you can get away with this, do you?" Jeff asked. He edged toward one of the windows of his room, which was on the fourth floor, overlooking a garden restaurant. He had no definite idea in mind except a vague hope of attracting attention in some way. "Whoever you got that passkey from knows you're coming to this room."

The little man spoke for the first time in a thin voice: "Get away from that window."

"Start undressin'," Steamboat ordered. "And stop worryin' about us. We run the building service union in this town and we put a bellhop in this hotel this afternoon . . . one of the boys. We expected you'd be here, wise guy."

Jeff made no move to undress. "If you shoot me it would attract a lot of unpleasant attention to you before you get out of this hotel," he said. "So suppose I don't undress and walk meekly into my accident?"

Steamboat's expression was overcome with an expression of sadistic pleasure. He removed a blackjack from his pocket and looked questioningly at Stein. Max nodded.

"Right on the temple," he said. Jeff turned his left wrist quickly, caught the silver dollar as it slid off and hurled the heavy coin through the window. The glass shattered and part of the pane fell outward, crashing on the sidewalk below. There were screams from women dining in the outdoor restaurant.

Steamboat lunged at him and Jeff put a table between himself and his big assailant, knocking the telephone from the desk with a sweep of his arm as he jumped past it.

"Shoot me and you're trapped," he shouted, hoping the telephone girl was quick to answer the call. He maneuvered around the table just out of Steamboat's reach. "Mix it up with me and you're wasting time. They'll be up here to investigate that window if the phone girl hasn't already sent someone. You're licked. You better get out while you can."

Steamboat looked hesitantly toward Stein. Pure hate shone out of the little man's ratlike eyes. His gun trembled in his hand. "Let's beat it," he snapped, finally. "Pull that phone out of the wall, Steamboat."

The big man broke the cord with a savage jerk and the two of them made for the door. "You better lam while you can, brother, Stein said. "I won't miss the next time."

Jeff breathed a sigh of relief when the door closed behind him and a cold sweat broke out over his body. He started for the door and then whirled around and ran to the adjoining room of the suite, where he seized a phone from a bedside table just as it began to ring. The operator's voice was excited as she asked:

"Is there anything the matter, sir? On the other phone I heard somebody—"

"Get me the house detective," Jeff cut in on her. She located him in forty-five seconds. "Two of Nick Lias' gunmen tried to shoot me—Mr. Gorman in Room 411. One big man with a flat face and broken nose; the other is small with flashy clothes. You can't miss them. Both are armed. They probably will duck out the back way, but we can't be sure. Can you block off the outside entrance gateway so their car can be stopped?"

"Right," the house detective declared. "I'll make a run for it."

Jeff sprang for the door and brushed aside a bellboy and an assistant manager who had come to investigate the smashed window. He had no time for an elevator and took the stairs, throwing the lobby in a turmoil when he reached it by streaking through it, shoving aside people who got in his way.

THE Neptune was built on the ocean front and was surrounded by a high wall which reached to the water's edge. There was only one exit and entrance for automobiles—a large gateway which was never closed during the winter season. However, the big iron gates did function. During the summer, when the hotel was closed, the gates were always kept closed. The house detective, Jeff could see, had closed one side and was swinging the other shut

when a car swung out from the parking place on the north side of the hotel. It skidded to a stop and Jeff, running hard, reached it just as Steamboat climbed out, his gun hand in his pocket; obviously on his gun.

"What's the idea?" he asked the house detective. "Open that gate."

In the distance a police siren wailed.

"Sorry," the detective said, stalling for time. "Nobody can leave for a few minutes." He had not been able to pull his gun.

Jeff was preparing to tackle Steamboat from behind when Stein's voice reached him from the car: "Cut it, Gorman, or I'll plug you."

Jeff pulled up. Steamboat cast a venomous glance at him, and then returned his attention to the house detective. "Open that gate or I'll shoot," he commanded. "Go for that gun of yours and you're a dead duck."

The house detective, a burly Irishman, hesitated and Jeff, afraid that the man would make a hopeless play, said: "Open it up. They've got us."

Reluctantly, the detective swung the bar which held the two sections of the gate together and pushed them apart while Stein started the car through and Steamboat Ginnis jumped into it, drawing his gun as he did and training it backward on them threateningly.

"Duck," the house detective said. "I'm going to open up."

Jeff threw himself to the ground and the house detective likewise threw himself down in the gravel roadway, his gun in his hand. Steamboat fired back at them when he saw the detective's gun appear, but the swift moving car spoiled his aim and the bullets kicked up dust yards away as the detective at Jeff's side steadied his elbow on the ground and took careful aim. His third shot got the tire on the left rear wheel of the vanishing car. The gunmen's car wobbled, climbed up on the sidewalk and smashed into a palm tree; sending it crashing to the ground.

"Wow," Jeff exclaimed, as he jumped to his feet. "That's shooting. That would be shooting even in the daylight."

"I used to be on the New York cops," the old detective panted as he lumbered along in Jeff's wake. The wailing siren of the police car grew nearer and its lights picked them up. The Neptune detective waved his arm toward the smashed automobile and the prowl car sped past them.

"I'm Gorman," Jeff told his new ally. "Did you call the cops?"

"Told the operator to," the house detective panted. "I know you, Mr. Gorman. I'm Mike Cassidy. Who are those birds?"

Jeff told him and when they reached the smashed car, the two prowl-car men, guns drawn, were wrenching at a twisted door. Inside, both men were unconscious. Steamboat Ginnis was bleeding badly from a gashed head.

"Uh-uh," one of the police officers exclaimed. "Lias' men." They got the two gunmen out of the car and laid them on the grass beside the pavement.

"Lias' men all right," the other city policeman said. He exchanged grins with his companion and then began questioning Jeff and Cassidy as the younger of the pair went off to summon an ambulance.

"What were all the grins about over these fellows being Lias' men?" Jeff asked, suspiciously, when the circumstances surrounding the shooting had been explained.

"I'm just a cop, Mr. Gorman," the prowl-car officer said. He took no offense at Jeff's tone. "I don't run the

city. I get my orders and follow them out, but just between you and me, I'm damned glad to get my hands on a couple of these birds. They aren't above the law when they go around shooting people and get caught in the act."

Mike Cassidy looked from the two wounded gunmen to Jeff. "I don't think I'd like to be in your shoes," he remarked.

CHAPTER XIII.

A BOOMERANG.

JEFF had been two hours at the police station in the office of Detective Captain Wilson when Jimmy Ranger located him and gained admittance. Wilson questioned Jimmy briefly and then permitted them to confer privately.

"I'm just about through here," Jeff told his assistant. "This is a break. And a good one. Are there many reporters outside?"

Jimmy nodded. "A mob—from all three papers and the press associations. What do you mean, this is a break? Now Lias will really be out for you with blood in his eye."

Jeff's quick smile slit his face. "Just so it's his eye, it's O. K.," he commented. "Hop across the street and take a room in that little hotel on the corner there," he added, pointing out the window. "Call Logan, J. Walter Logan. Tell him what's happened and tell him that if he values his precious hide to get down to that room. I'm going to duck out the back way and I want to talk to him before I talk to reporters."

Jimmy nodded. Jeff returned his attention to the police, who wanted all details of the affair. Steamboat Ginnis was still unconscious in the hospital, but Max Stein had been brought around and now, badly patched up, stoutly denied that he had ever seen Jeff before when they were brought together in Captain Wilson's office.

"You're a liar, Stein," Jeff said harshly. Cassidy, the Neptune house detective, laughed. "I heard the little rat call Mr. Gorman by name when their car stopped at the gate," he reported.

Stein maintained a stubborn silence and hotel employees, apparently terrorized, all reported he had not been seen in the building. "We were just going to have dinner at the hotel when we remembered we had an appointment some place else." He gave the names of two girls. A half hour later and he grimly clung to his story.

"Lock him up," Wilson said disgustedly. A sergeant looked at the captain, rubbing his hands. Wilson shook his head.

"You better shake your head if you know what's good for you," Stein said insolently. "You guys go to work on me and you'll wish you hadn't."

Jeff looked curiously at the detective captain. Wilson's jaws were clenched fiercely but he finally waved Stein and his guards toward the door with a futile gesture. Apologetically, he looked at Jeff: "I wish all the politicians would leave town for about three days," he remarked. He offered Jeff a cigar. "The D. A.'s coming over in a few minutes. We'll have to ask you to wait."

Jeff nodded. "Can I go out and catch a cup of coffee?"

"I'll send a man with you," Captain Wilson said.

Jeff grinned. "I'll be back, captain," he said. "I'm sure the chief won't object. I know your position and I want as much of your co-operation as I can get. After all, I'm not going to men-

tion to the press that unfortunate little matter of the detective car that followed us this morning when we left the airport. It might not sound good in print. In view of that, I think I'm deserving of a little trust, too."

Wilson hesitated, then smiled. "Well, it's a little irregular, but go ahead."

LOGAN was in the room Jimmy Ranger had engaged. The big, beefy president of the Flamingo Jockey Club greeted Jeff with a curt: "What's the meaning of all this nonsense, Mr. Gorman? I was entertaining at my home when your call came and, although I am interested in meeting you, I don't understand this secrecy and it doesn't appeal to me. Neither does the hour."

Jeff smiled pleasantly. Logan was putting up a nice front, but Jeff knew that he was nervous.

"Two of your friends tried to kill me," he remarked. "You should be more careful of your associations, Mr. Logan."

The racetrack executive stared at him. "What?" he demanded. He turned slightly pale beneath his heavy tan and Jeff realized, with surprise, that Logan knew nothing of the attempt on his life. He looked at Ranger: "Didn't you tell him?"

Jimmy shook his head. "No, but it was on the radio. But maybe he doesn't have a radio, Cash."

Logan glowered at Ranger. "I already have told you I was entertaining at my home when I received your call. I haven't heard the radio news all evening."

Jeff informed him of events. Logan laughed. "Certainly, you aren't intimating that I had anything to do with this," he said. His expression was one of amused disdain.

"I certainly am, Mr. Logan," Jeff said. There was no humor in his face now and his black eyes were hard as flint. "In just ten minutes I am going back to make a statement to the district attorney. I realize that he probably is in your political pocket, but the newspapers are not and, after my interview with the officials is concluded, I will make a statement in the press. Whether or not I make any reference to your alliance with the underworld in that statement depends entirely upon yourself, Mr. Logan."

Logan rose to his feet, quivering with rage. "You make any such statement and I'll sue you for criminal libel. I'll also inform the papers that I'll sue them if they print it. I've never met Nick Lias—"

Jeff cut him off with an angry, impatient gesture. "I'm not interested in whether you have ever met him or not, Logan," he snapped. "In political circles it's generally known that you and Bill Barber are allied to keep Coral Island Park from opening. Although nothing directly has been printed to this effect, the general public is aware that such an alliance exists. It is known that Nick Lias has an interest in Tamiami Park. I arrived yesterday morning and was warned by Lias not to invest in Drake's enterprise. I do invest. This evening, an effort is made to murder me. All these facts would not look good in print and I assure you that I will see that they are printed, including the fact that when it was known that I planned to invest in the track, your own representative in the legislature moved to have the Coral Island dates for opening advanced."

Logan controlled his temper, answering contemptuously. "Nothing could be proved, even if you did succeed in

dragging me into the case."

"Nothing could be proved, I agree, as long as the case remained in the hands of the local authorities," Jeff remarked. "Sit down, Mr. Logan, you're going to get a shock."

Logan remained standing. His expression of contempt remained unchanged, but Jeff sensed uneasiness behind the big man's mask. "I don't understand your meaning, Mr. Gorman."

"Your associates, unfortunately, have made a mistake," Jeff said. "I have found it necessary to advise the Federal government of this misstep. Investigators from the Department of Justice are now enroute to Tamiami, interstate commerce being involved; technically, of course, but, nevertheless, involved.

The attempt at murder fortunately plays into my hands in this instance. It is within my power to indicate that I am suspicious that you have a part in an active attempt to form a monopoly in restraint of trade or to state that I have no reason to believe that you are actively associated therein. I know that you wouldn't countenance murder, Mr. Logan, but attempted murder within a conspiracy to violate the anti-trust laws would most certainly reflect upon you and very seriously. There is little doubt in my mind that evidence could be unearthed involving you in such a conspiracy if the Federal representatives dug deeply enough."

Logan sat down slowly. His hand trembled as he lit a cigarette. "You can't do this," he said. "I'm not involved in any way. There is no attempt at monopoly." He took courage. "Why, it's ridiculous. We have two competing tracks right here."

"Well, you might say they were competing tracks," Jeff admitted, casually. "However, that is not the basis of the charge. The monopolistic practice is within the building trades industry. In my complaint the charge could be confined entirely to the activities of Nick Lias, the labor unions which he dominates through dummies and certain rough associations of contractors controlled through Meggs on behalf of Lias, his silent partner." Jeff paused pointedly. "Or the charge could be expanded to include the racetracks as associated in the conspiracy in this particular instance with Lias as the tool of Mr. J. Walter Logan and Mr. William Barber, exercising a monopolistic influence on their behalf in order to keep a prospective rival from entering business!"

J. Walter Logan was a man accustomed to making quick decisions. A

deal was indicated. "I deny all of your implications," he said. "They are completely without foundation. And I am not without friends in Washington. However, I am interested in seeing what you have to propose."

Jeff laughed. "In other words, you don't know how much I know and how much might be found out, but if the terms are reasonable, you'll play ball."

Logan smiled coldly. "Have it that way if you care to, but the interpretation is your own. I, frankly, am just curious."

Jeff leaned forward and spoke intently. "I don't plan to ask you to call off your dogs, because you wouldn't. Working as always, through third parties and covering your tracks a bit more thoroughly you will continue to proceed along your present path. However, I do warn you not to do anything more through the legislature."

Logan shrugged his shoulders. "I have no control over the legislature and I doubt if, at this time, the government would be interested in investigating the State legislature. There's a national election coming up, you know."

Jeff nodded. "That's one reason my price is so reasonable," he said. "Mr. Logan, I want you to take a greater interest in our track. As a matter of fact, I want you to become a shareholder. I have a ten percent interest in the track which I am willing to relinquish to a man of your importance in racing for a very small sum—fifty thousand dollars."

Logan stared at him incredulously. "What?" he demanded. His face darkened. "Why this is nothing but an attempt at extortion!"

Jeff held up his hand. "Please, Mr. Logan," he said, mock horror in his voice. "I beg of you—don't use such harsh language. Let's just say that you see the advantages of protecting your interest by acquiring part ownership in the new track in the event that it should be successful. Then, of course, you would have something to say about its management and racing dates. And you would hardly be open to a conspiracy charge concerning activities directed against a company in which you held an interest, would you?"

Logan smiled, somewhat grimly. "I see your point," he said. "However, I don't think I have anything to fear from you, Mr. Gorman." He put on his hat. "Good night."

"Don't deceive yourself," Jeff said. "You have no idea how deeply your companions are involved, which, of necessity will involve you to a greater or lesser extent. And correct your impression about my financial position. It is excellent. I simply prefer to operate with other people's money. I will, if necessary, use my own."

Logan stared at him for thirty seconds and Jeff's black eyes never wavered despite his embroideries upon the truth. Logan sat down again. "Very well," he said. "You must be a good poker player, because I don't know how much lying you're doing and how much you may be telling the truth and I usually can tell. However, the matter is worth thinking over. I really should protect my interests in the event that Coral Island Park should open. What's your proposition in full so that I can discuss it with my attorneys tomorrow."

Jeff laughed. "There isn't any tomorrow. I see the press as soon as I leave here. I want your check for fifty thousand dollars now. In return you will receive a receipt and an informal transfer of such of my interests as amount to ten percent of the total own-

ership in the park; all of which can be formalized tomorrow."

Logan hesitated momentarily and then took out his pen and check book. "I admit you're pushing me into this against my better judgment and it's very little more than blackmail," he said. "However—"

CHAPTER XIV.

ANYTHING FOR THE PRESS.

JIMMY RANGER stared at Jeff in amazement as they returned to police headquarters. "When did you make a complaint to the Department of Justice?" he demanded.

"I haven't," he replied with a pleased smile. "Just an idea, and apparently, Mr. J. Walter Logan thinks almost as highly of it as I do—fifty thousand dollars worth in fact. I'll look into it later."

"Tch, tch," Jimmy clucked. "A falsehood."

"Just a little white lie," Jeff replied. Jimmy he knew was really somewhat shocked; not at the idea itself but at running such a bluff. "Now for the D. A.—I'll bet he'll be as anxious to delve into this as Mr. Logan was to dive out of it."

The district attorney had not even come himself, dispatching instead, a young assistant, who handled the subject tenderly and finally shook his head in despairing fashion.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Gorman," he said. "There really doesn't seem to be enough evidence against these fellows to lodge a charge of attempted murder. Nothing, as a matter of fact, except your undisputed word. Of course, they did fire at the watchman in leaving the grounds of the hotel, but they tell me, and so do you, that he pulled a gun and began firing at them. Actually, he had no right to bar that gate without definite knowledge that a crime had been committed."

"It was Neptune property," Jeff protested. "He had every right within the law and, in addition, they forced him to open it at gun point."

"According to the testimony," said the assistant district attorney, a man named Miller, "no gun was seen until the house detective produced his weapon. That, of course, would make it self-defense in the eyes of the law." He shrugged his shoulders. "A technicality, but the law is the law and it must be observed or unscrupulous persons might take advantage of it to infringe upon justice."

"Are you referring to me," Jeff demanded coldly.

"Of course, not," Miller said. "I'll hold these men over night in the hopes that we turn up some more evidence."

"Are they in possession of permits to carry firearms?" Jeff asked. A note was handed the district attorney by a messenger.

"Why these men are deputy sheriffs," he said, smiling blandly. "That makes the whole thing incredible."

"I'd like to see when they were appointed and know why Max Stein didn't say something about being a deputy sheriff," Jeff remarked, his eyes narrowed to small pin points. "As you say, the whole thing in incredible. And furthermore, Mr. Miller, if you value your political hide, you'll keep these men longer than tomorrow morning. I'm charging them with assault with intent to kill and if you release them without lodging any charge except suspicion, you may have of lot of explaining to do very shortly."

Miller's round face flushed. "I don't

advise you to threaten me, Mr. Gorman," he snapped. "We don't know a great deal about you and assault on an officer of the law is a serious charge which will bear investigation."

"I didn't lay a hand on anyone," Jeff said. "Don't try to bluff me. I don't bluff."

"You can leave, Mr. Gorman," Miller said. "Whatever action the evidence warrants will be taken, including action against yourself if it is found that you have in any way been interfering with the activities of peace officers."

Jeff put on his hat and, summoning Ranger to follow him, made for the door, repressing an angry retort with difficulty. Arguing would do no good now, but he was unable to repress one final comment. "Tread softly, little man," he said, pausing with his hand on the door. "The glades are full of moccasins."

A HAND grasped his lapel as he stepped into the corridor. "I'm Rogers from the *Tribune*," an eager-faced young man said. "What's this all about, Mr. Gorman—you are Gorman, aren't you?"

Jeff nodded and was instantly surrounded by reporters. Flashlights flicked the hallway with their intense light.

"Yes, I am," he nodded to Jimmy. "My assistant, Mr. James Ranger of Denver. An attempt was made on my life by two gunmen whom I know to be members of Nick Lias' mob. One of them was with Lias when Mr. Ranger and myself arrived from Brazil. Lias and this man, Max Stein, accompanied

by a third party, met us at the airport at Dinner Key and warned us against coming here."

"Why?" four men shouted the question simultaneously.

"Because I was coming to invest a quarter of a million dollars in Coral Island Racetrack," Jeff said. Had he said that he had just shot the mayor he couldn't have caused more consternation. The reporters clamored for details and Jeff gave them all he felt was necessary to build up strong public resentment against Lias and the district attorney's office, quoting Miller verbatim concerning the deputy sheriffship of Stein and Ginnis.

"If Mr. Ginnis is a deputy sheriff," Jeff added with a grin, "it might interest you to know that he once spent a term in Atlanta on a charge of manslaughter."

As he and Jimmy finally broke away from the correspondents, Jeff winked.

Jeff hurled the heavy coin through the window and then knocked the telephone from the table.

"I don't think Mr. Lias is going to try any more pot shots at me for a while—his guns are well spiked."

"I wouldn't be too sure," Jimmy said. "Why were you so anxious to get away

from those guys—they were ready to print anything you said."

Jeff wiped his brow. "Talking with reporters is mental work of a very delicate and difficult character, Mr. Ranger," he said. "One thing to remember is that you should never talk to reporters too long or you're liable to find out that they have picked you clean. They were asking me too many questions about Mr. J. Walter Logan and Bill Barber, both of whom are in a position to cancel checks tomorrow in the event they should decide that we are going to double-cross them anyway. We've got to keep them partially demobilized until that stuff is in our bank account."

Jimmy looked at him sharply. "And how do you think Barber is going to feel when he learns that you were bluffing about Gardiner having an interest in the park? He probably knows you're broke by now and will just fade right out of the picture."

Jeff, who had been feeling quite pleased with himself, looked at Jimmy with startled attention and stopped looking pleased. "Oh! Oh!" He snapped his fingers. "I forgot all about Dr. McMitchell. We've got to get hold of Dallas Reid; where's the car?"

CHAPTER XV.

UNEXPECTED AID.

RANGER slipped behind the wheel of a car. "Where does the Reid girl live?" Jeff blinked. "I don't know. It's not a good idea to go out and see her anyway," he said. "You can't tell a girl with Dallas Reid's temper that the husband of one of her blue-blooded friends is a possible double-crosser—" He paused thoughtfully and snapped his fingers." Or maybe it's Mrs. McMitchell." Jimmy started and looked at Jeff in surprise. "She seemed like a very nice little girl except that she looked a little expensive for the doctor."

"Maybe that's the answer," Jeff said. "He wouldn't be the first man to get himself into a jam trying to live up to Palm Beach on a South Brooklyn income."

Jimmy looked at his employer impatiently. "Well, where are we going. Here we are on the Marine Highway."

"Just keep following the signs out to Coral Island," he said. "We'll call on Drake. How the devil do you tell a man to keep his girl's mouth shut?"

Jimmy had no answer to this one, and Jeff sank deep into thought not speaking again until they reached the outskirts of Coral City. "It would be impossible to keep Dallas Reid's mouth shut," he said, "so I think we will approach it from the opposite direction and convince Mr. Drake that he should use Miss Reid as a sounding board. If we're right about McMitchell, the phony information we pass through her will trap him."

Drake's home was on the bay side of Coral Island, the residential area of Coral City, and from the driveway of Drake's British Colonial type of house, the new racetrack could be seen on the mainland shore. One set of lights was already blazing over the grandstand.

"Our electrical contractor isn't losing any time anyway," Jeff said.

"I wouldn't either at twelve thousand dollars for twenty-four hours work," Jimmy Ranger said. "Do I go into the house?"

Jeff shook his head. "Turn the car around and park it across the driveway so you can see the street both north and south. If anyone looking like a Lias' man comes along, I trust you will

know what to do with him, my fran."

Drake met him at the door, his boyish face tense. "I just heard the news over the radio. Were you injured?"

Jeff's quick smile flashed over his features and he spread his arms wide. "No bruises," he laughed. "And we're in fifty thousand dollars. I think we can use it, can't we?"

Drake stared at him in blank astonishment. "We certainly can," he said finally. "But I don't get it!"

Jeff sank down in a chair and said, "Aren't you going to offer me a buttermilk?"

Drake concealed his curiosity with an effort and rang for a servant. "Anything you want," he said.

Jeff inspected him carefully and decided Drake was a solid young man and one with whom he could place the cards face up. "I have a little confession to make," he said. "That hundred thousand dollars that I had in my pocket when I spoke to you this afternoon was the entire bank roll with the exception of twenty-five thousand in my account in San Francisco. The remainder necessary to finance the purchase of my share in the track, I obtained by selling fifteen percent of my own interest to our mutual enemy, Bill Barber, and when it became apparent that we would need additional financing I was engaged in thinking of whom among my friends I could tap for additional funds when Steamboat Ginnis and his pal came up to blackjack me into a little bathtub accident." He laughed. "I hope I have your approval in transferring the blackjack into a boomerang. It flew back at Mr. J. Walter Logan and smacked him right in the eye for fifty thousand dollars—representing the sale of another ten percent interest. So now you see why it was necessary for me to insist upon a fifty-five percent share."

Drake was speechless for a moment. "It's inconceivable," he said finally. "Why, you're making our competitors finance the track."

Jeff nodded cheerfully. "I have always found that to be an excellent idea," he said. He explained the day's maneuvers. When he was finished Drake blinked his eyes. "You better have another buttermilk on that," he said. "I can see now I have been a little woolly lamb wandering around amidst a whole pack of wolves."

Jeff laughed again. "Biting wolves is my specialty," he said. "I have something very important now that I want you to do for me. It involves your fiancée but there is no danger in it." Jeff paused thoughtfully. Talking to young men about their fiancées was always a subject requiring a delicate approach.

"Yes?" Drake prodded him.

"Miss Reid can be of great value to us," Jeff began tactfully. "However, I think it would be best that she did not realize that she was taking part in our plan in this particular instance. I don't want you to be offended, but I feel possibly your friend, Dr McMitchell is passing information around." He ignored Drake's protest, and continued: "It may be that he does not do this purposely, or it may be that his wife chats across bridge tables. After all, they move in the same social circles as Logan does. Therefore, what I have in mind is that you tell Miss Reid several things that I would like to have Logan, Barber, and Lias misinformed about. Tell them to her as if they were truthful statements. In that way nothing will have to be explained to her and she won't have to lie or act. If the information doesn't reach the par-

ties we want it to, we will know that I was wrong.

Drake considered this for a moment and finally nodded his head. "That's fair enough," he said. "I'll place myself in your hands. I'm no match for these sharpshooters. What's the first item on the ledger?"

"I want them to think that we have unlimited financial backing," Jeff said, his eyes narrowing shrewdly. "Tell her that, unbenownst to you, Gardiner had come into the picture in Havana as my partner and I did not inform you of this until tonight."

"O. K.," Drake said. "The only difficulty is that she is likely to write him a letter or send him a telegram telling him what a great-hearted philanthropist he is."

Jeff grinned. "Yes, that's a thought," he said. "You had better get her a little riled up at him by telling her that Gardiner had no confidence in you and was cold to her personal plea, but that when he saw I was going into it, he thought it was worth getting into from a standpoint of making money."

Drake nodded appreciatively, and Jeff decided that his new partner was not at least lacking in understanding of the somewhat tempestuous character of his future bride.

Drake suddenly started and the worried lines returned to his face. "I completely forgot to tell you of the latest development," he said. "A local attorney by the name of Cathcart—he was elected a member of the city commission on a reform ticket last year—has begun the circulation of a petition requesting that the county attorney, institute suit to prevent the opening of a track on the grounds that it will be a gambling establishment and therefore contrary to the spirit of the county."

Jeff stared at him. "What the devil do they expect to gain by that?" he asked. "Pari mutuel gambling is legal. Any judge would throw the case out of court if they did bring it."

Drake spoke dryly. "Possibly you don't know our judges."

"Oh, like that?" Jeff said. "I thought since this was a different county that Mr. Logan and Bill Barber were not quite so influential; but I still don't see on what grounds such a case could be based."

"Neither do I," Drake said, "but there it is."

"What is this Cathcart, just a screwball reformer?" Jeff asked, more worried than his manner showed. "Or is this a move by our friends?"

Drake informed him that it undoubtedly was a move by the Barber-Logan interests as he had contributed substantially to Cathcart's campaign fund and Cathcart had made the move without advising him of it.

"In other words, they got to him?" Jeff said. Drake nodded and Jeff added: "When did he start this petition going around?"

"Apparently, he started it very recently—just tonight," Drake said. "I just got word of it a few minutes before you came in; I haven't been so innocent that I am not well protected politically in Coral County."

"In other words, it could have been something that came up in the last couple of hours?" Jeff asked. When Drake answered affirmatively, Jeff said: "That looks like one Logan has pulled out of his hat since he talked to me. Whose our lawyer?"

"State Senator Bob Sutherland," Drake answered. "He isn't actively practicing at present due to his official position, but he is actually the attorney

for the track and everything is handled by his firm. Incidentally, he is honest."

Jeff lifted his eyebrows. "Yes?" he asked.

"Absolutely," Drake informed him. "Even the Tamiami *Tribune* agrees with that. He is a very able man, too."

"Well, I guess we will have to get your very able man out of bed," Jeff said. "I doubt very much if they have any legal ground to stand on—just a move to delay us so we can't meet the opening day—but we had better make sure. I'd like to talk to Sutherland about the legislature, anyway. I have—"

Three sharp blasts of an automobile horn interrupted him. Jeff jumped to his feet. "Turn out those porch lights of yours."

Drake jumped for the switch and plunged the veranda in darkness. "What is it," he asked, tensely.

"Do you have a floodlight for the lawn?" Jeff asked.

When Drake answered, "Yes," he commanded: "Turn it on. That was my man. Lias has sent a couple more of his hoodlums out to have a conversation."

Drake pressed the control switch and the entire lawn of his small estate was flooded with glaring light. The veranda faced on the bay and the driveway to the street was to the north of the house. Cautiously Jeff and Drake made their way to the corner of the building and peered around it. Jimmy Ranger was running toward him, ducking from palm tree to palm tree for shelter.

"You damn fool," he swore. "What are you trying to do? Get me shot? Three guys are climbing over the south wall and you turn on all the lights."

Toward the bay there was a large clump of hibiscus bushes and Jeff motioned his companions toward this concealing shelter. "We'll wait these boys out," he said.

For possibly five minutes there was no movement and then, around the north side of the house three men approached with their hands conspicuously hanging by their sides.

"They don't look like thugs to me," Drake remarked. "One of them is wearing overalls."

Jeff looked at his watch. "One thirty-five," he said. "Probably the plumber come to fix your kitchen drain." He arose when the men turned toward the porch and called out, "O. K. Up with them!" The three

men started, one of them swore, and all three raised their arms above their heads. "Just stand like you are," Jeff said. He stepped out of the bushes followed by Drake and Ranger. "Frisk them, Jimmy," he ordered.

One of the invading trio spoke, his voice quavering with fright; "We ain't armed, mister. We just want to see Mr. Drake."

Jimmy ran his hands over them expertly. "No guns."

"All right," Jeff said, harshly. "Turn around."

Drake identified himself.

"Yeah, I know you, Mr. Drake," one of the men said. "We're workmen over at the track. We wanted to find your new partner—"

One of the other men cut in: "That's him," he said, pointing at Jeff. He was one of the workmen with whom Jeff had spoken when he had entered the grounds that afternoon. Jeff grinned. "Hi-ya, fella," he said. He put a little cracker drawl in his voice to help get the interview on a homey basis, remembering that he had given Pensacola as his place of birth that afternoon. "What's on your mind?"

Drake spoke up before the man could answer. "What do you mean by coming over the wall," he demanded sharply.

"I'll handle this, Will, if you don't mind," Jeff said to Drake. He nodded toward the workman he had just addressed. "This man and I are old friends."

"I admit this ain't no way to come calling," the spokesman of the group said, "but we were afraid we might be followed. We spoke up tonight against a strike rule—"

"Strike?" Jeff was startled. He hadn't expected it so soon. "They sure are piling it into us. What unions are being called out?"

The spokesman, who identified himself as Lew Carter, explained that officials of local union chapters had been called to a general conference of the Central Trades Council and had been asked to ratify a motion that a strike vote be placed before all the separate unions involved in construction work and trucking in connection with the track. There had been strong opposition, Carter reported, principally as the result of the impression that Gorman had made that afternoon at the track. However, opposition had been overridden in rough-shod fashion by the Lias-controlled delegates and the resolution to place a strike vote before the memberships of the various locals had been passed.

"Time and a half for the two night shifts is the demand that is going to be made," Carter said. "If you refuse to meet it, the strike vote will be taken tomorrow night at seven o'clock and it'll pass unless you do something about it, Mr. Gorman."

"For instance?" Jeff asked.

"We don't want to strike," Carter replied. He was angry in a sort of a hopeless way. "But those strong-arm guys from the Lias mob will be salted around among all the boys and about seven of the officials are on his pay roll, and the secretary of the Central Board is a Lias racketeer. We ain't got a chance unless you can circulate among the honest leaders and convince 'em that you can protect us if we buck Lias."

The three stared silently at Jeff.

He nodded toward Jimmy: "Give Mr. Ranger the names of the men I ought to see."

The three union men conferred briefly and then named seventeen "re-

liable" leaders of the rank and file.

"Can you get them together some time tomorrow," Jeff asked. The men said they would try and would inform him in the morning, Carter inquiring, "Do you think you can do anything?"

Privately Jeff didn't think he could, but he nodded his head confidently. Tomorrow morning was seven hours away and a lot of things could happen. "Which union will be the toughest to crack?" he asked.

"The concrete mixers—that's Local No. 10," Carter replied. "Lias has two of his men in the local and he controls all the contractors and has an interest in Meggs' outfit. He even has a piece of one of the wholesalers. They're sure to walk out, they've got to."

Jeff frowned. "You can't pass their picket line?" he asked. They shook their heads. He did some quick thinking. "How would you feel if I went to court and asked for a restraining order on the grounds that time and a half for night work has never been established anywhere in the United States as a basis for that kind of a job as long as separate shifts are used?"

Carter shook his head. "We wouldn't give a damn, but you'd never get away with it," he said. "Lias would bring too much pressure to bear."

One of the other men spoke up, the oldest of the three: "I think that's a bad idea anyway, Mr. Gorman—it always antagonizes the men when you try to get a court order to prevent a walkout."

Jeff nodded his head in agreement. "You're right," he said. He put his hands in his pockets and paced up and down the lawn for several minutes while the group watched him silently. Jimmy Ranger winked at Drake. "The master mind is having a brainstorm," he said.

Jeff looked at him angrily. There were times when his irrepressible assistant's irreverent sense of humor got on his nerves, and when he was trying to impress three union leaders with his infallibility in a matter in which $950,000 was at stake, decidedly was such a time.

He jerked his thumb over his shoulder. "I thought I told you to guard the drive," he snapped.

"Yes, sir," Jimmy said, fading around the side of the house. Jeff had, as a matter of fact, had his brainstorm, but he resumed his pacing, giving a splendid exhibition along Hollywood lines of a large-scale executive putting his all into the solution of a problem. Halting dramatically in midstride, he grasped the astonished Mr. Drake by the arm. "I think this is just the opening I have been waiting for," he cried triumphantly. Turning to Carter he asked: "If the concrete mixers walk out, the teamsters can't handle any cement required for the track, can they?"

Carter, much impressed by Jeff's cerebral marathon, nodded a silent, wide-eyed agreement.

"Is the stuff delivered direct from the railroad station, or does it pass through a deliverer's hands?" Jeff asked sharply. It was apparent from his attitude that the entire solution depended on the answer.

Carter didn't feel that he should take the entire responsibility for the answer. He looked at his companions.

"That's right," the older man said, "they buy it through wholesalers, but it is delivered direct to the contractors, or to the job—the wholesale idea is just a racket."

Jeff smote Wilbur Drake enthusiastically on the back, much to Mr. Drake's confusion. "That's it," Jeff said tersely.

"That makes it a Federal matter—interstate commerce." He turned to the three union men. "You get those seventeen men together tomorrow," he said confidently. "There isn't going to be any strike!"

When Carter and his two companions had left, Drake turned to his new partner and asked excitedly: "What's your angle about the Federal government?"

"How the hell should I know?" Jeff asked. "It sounded good, didn't it? That's twice tonight I sold it." Drake's face fell and Jeff slapped him cheerfully on the back. "Brace up," he said. "Maybe we got something. Get that lawyer of yours out of bed. We're going to have midnight skull practice."

CHAPTER XVI.

CEMENTED TRAP.

SUTHERLAND was a tall, erect, sandy-haired man of middle age, a military bearing and a cordial manner. He didn't object to being routed out of bed, or, if he did, he didn't show it, receiving them with the utmost friendliness.

"The matter of the petition isn't urgently important right this minute," he said, after a brief discussion with Jeff, who nodded his agreement. "This labor situation is the one which has to be taken care of right now."

He talked it over at length with Jeff and finally said: "Maybe you have something there. This is no time of night to be getting the Federal attorney out of bed but he's a good-natured Irishman named Higgins and I know him pretty well so we'll give it a try."

Jeff warmed to Sutherland even more at that. This was a man who moved!

"Grumpy as a bear," Sutherland reported, after talking with Higgins, "but he said to come right over when he heard Lias was involved."

Higgins was short, dynamic and black haired. He had gotten over his grumpiness by the time they had arrived and was raiding the ice box of his home and had coffee on the stove.

"Tell me the whole story," he said to Jeff. "I read about the attempted murder in the first edition of the *Tribune* and got some later details over the radio. Start at the beginning. Don't skip anything."

Jeff related all the details except his recent conversation with J. Walter Logan. He couldn't see that the little deal he had made with the Flamingo Park president had any bearing on the case; not at the moment, at least, and he had promised not to involve Logan.

"Nothing much here that's concrete," Higgins said. But he pointed out ways and means in which Sutherland could draw up a complaint which he would forward to Washington with psuedo-legal charges that would look good but wouldn't amount to much.

"I'll wire for investigators and send a brief of this complaint," he said. He told them he would recommend immediate action as the case seemed to be hot; a break imminent. "That ought to get 'em," he concluded.

It seemed that Higgins himself had been spoiling to pile into Lias but, due to the lack of complainants, and no recent untoward incidents which had been brought to his attention, there was not much he could proceed with.

He told Jeff and Sutherland to get in touch with him the first thing in the morning. "I think you can be sure the investigators will be here."

Jeff pressed the man's anxiety. "Why don't you call Washington now," he said. "Get someone you know real well

in the Department of Justice and present the facts to him so he can bring them to the attention of the attorney general as soon as the office opens and our wires arrive. That way we'll be sure of promoting attention."

Higgins didn't need much persuading, being a fiery, enthusiastic little man anyway. "I think we're going to crack these guys," he said to Jeff, grinning. "You get in there and pitch, boy."

He called Washington.

Jeff was up at seven the next morning, with four hours of sleep behind him and a full day ahead. He went immediately to the airport where he met Roberta Lane, who had done herself proud in the way of clothes, and introduced her to Jack Connly, the private detective whom he was putting on McMitchell. Bobbie and Connly, who was going to handle the case personally, had been on the same plane but hadn't known each other.

"You still don't know each other," Jeff said. "Just forget you ever met."

He explained the situation to them both and said he had had to shake off a shadow on the way out.

"Your business is to vamp Rodney Nordoff—our distinguished racing commissioner," Jeff said. "Don't come near me unless we are introduced by some third party. You are a millionaire lady friend of Dallas Reid come to invest in her park but wisely seeking the commissioner's advice. Keep your ears open! Don't ask any leading questions that would throw suspicion on yourself. Catch?" She did.

Connly was to work underground, not meeting McMitchell at all unless he later felt it was necessary.

"I thought I told you to bring a couple of men," Jeff complained.

"I have two men down here on another job and I have a connection with a local outfit," Connly said.

"I can give you one lead . . . Detective Captain Wilson," Jeff said. "Approach him confidentially. Privately. He wants to break up these rackets, but his hands are tied by the politicos. He's just waiting for a proper spot."

ALWAYS cautious, Jeff drove back to town from the airport by a different route and reached Senator Sutherland's office unobserved as far as he knew. Bobbie and Connly went to town by separate taxicabs.

"Higgins got the go-ahead," Sutherland told him. "There are a couple of special investigators from the anti-trust division of the Department of Justice on the way down here now and the local F. B. I. will co-operate, actively if necessary and in an advisory capacity otherwise. They're pretty busy with their own work right now, but the two tie in in many ways. There are three F. B. I. men down here and they intimated to Higgins that they have some information that will be of great help."

Jeff contacted Jimmy whom he had left at the hotel in case there were any telephone calls. The union rank and file leader, Lew Carter, had called. The meeting was set for noon in the back room of a jook joint on the Marine Highway seven miles north of Coral Island City.

"Do you think it would be ethical to let them know these Federal men are moving in," Jeff asked. "I can't see any other way of getting them hopped up enough to fight and if they do fight, we may get a lot of helpful information out of a scrap that would be of use to the Justice Department men. I promised them Federal help—and here it is."

Sutherland called Higgins regarding

this. "I'll call Washington and explain the situation," he promised. Reporting back ten minutes later he said: "O. K. —stir up as much dissension as you can —that'll bring the skeletons out of the closets."

Lew Carter greeted him enthusiastically. "They're in a fighting mood," he said. "Have you got news?"

"I sure have," Jeff said. He was introduced around, sounding out the various members.

"They can all be relied upon," his visitors of the previous night told him. Jeff hopped up on a table.

"Men," he said, "you've got the greatest chance now you'll ever have to clear the racketeers out of your unions. Not only that, but you can clean up the entire political, tax-eating racket situation in the whole city and obtain for yourself and your fellow citizens honest local government. Right now a lot of muscle men headed by Lias are levying on every dollar made in this city in one way or another. I'm going to be in there slugging until the fight is finished —whether I finish the racetrack or not."

They cheered him wildly, but he could see that while the sentiment was with him, more than just words were necessary.

"It isn't just me that's in the fight now," he said. "Drake, myself and Senator Sutherland, whom you all know to be honest, have been conferring with the Federal attorney, Mr. Higgins, and we've been burning the telegraph and telephone wires to Washington all night. Even as I talk to you special investigators from the anti-trust division of the Department of Justice are flying here from Washington to help us win this fight. And the F. B. I. is in on it, too."

That put on the clincher. They told him he needn't worry about any union except the concrete mixers.

"Can we tell the boys?" Lew asked.

"You bet your life," Jeff said. "And dig up all the information you can about Lias and his mob and pass it along to us."

Accompanied by Lew Carter he went to the Central Trade Union headquarters and talked with the general secretary, George Murphy. Their interview was not private, however. Murphy's assistant was Clam Rogers, the hard-faced, silent gunman who had accompanied Lias to the airport the previous day to greet Jeff.

"We don't want none of that peace talk," Clam said, when Jeff tried to present his case for the track to Murphy. "Get it up and meet our terms or shut up—we're striking."

"That's what you think," Jeff replied.

Clam looked at Lew Carter and doubled his fist suggestively. "A fink, huh?" he said. "We know how to treat finks."

Jeff leaned forward and pushed an inkwell on the desk into Clam's lap. The man sprang back, cursing—ink all over his white suit, and reached into his coat for his gun. Jeff jumped over the table, caught his wrist and twisted it expertly and spun him around into a hammerlock. Reaching over Clam's shoulder he took possession of the racketeer's gun. "I just wanted to show you what I think of stupid oafs like you," Jeff said, releasing the man and booting him halfway across the floor with a shove of his shoe against the small of the man's back. "Now you sit down and listen while I do the talking."

Dispossessed of his gun, Clam once

more became very silent and sullen.

"The men aren't going to strike," Jeff said. "If one of the men who leads the fight against the strike vote is injured, you and Lias and his mob will all land in the clink. Don't smile! You won't be dealing with local politicians. The United States Department of Justice is sending special investigators down here and the F. B. I. is also taking a hand in the game."

There was no mistaking the fear in Clam Rogers' eyes.

"You're lyin'," he said, sullenly. But there wasn't much conviction in the statement.

Jeff turned on Murphy. "The boys tell me you were always pretty straight, but you didn't put up much of a fight when Lias and his gang moved in. If you're honest, you'd better jump in quick on our side. And if you're not, you'd better start mending your fences." He didn't give Murphy a chance to speak. "Tell those Local No. 10 leaders that if they know what's good for them they'll give Lias the ditch tonight and not try very hard to push through that strike vote. And you can tell the men they can speak without fear of reprisal. If they strike a lot of people are going to get in trouble that could have avoided it. Why get in dutch for a bunch of heels like that punk you have sitting beside you?"

He left Murphy looking pale. "I don't think we're going to have any strike at all," he told Drake over the phone. At 9 p. m. they got the news: no walkout.

IT was exactly an hour later that Jeff received a mysterious phone call. "Come over to the Club Bahaman," a feminine voice told him.

"It looks like a trap," Jimmy said. Jeff shrugged. "Give me the phone," he said. He called the Club Bahaman and got hold of Lias. "I'm coming over to your joint and buy a glass of buttermilk and maybe have a fly at your dice game—I presume it's crooked."

"What are you tellin' me for, wise guy?" Lias asked.

"I just wanted to let you know that the Federal attorney here will know where I went in case I shouldn't be treated nicely," Jeff said. "I have a cautious nature when I'm dealing with wild pigs."

"Don't pull that Federal stuff on me," Lias said. "You ran a nice bluff tonight, but I ain't biting for it like those suckers you hopped up. I ain't broke no laws."

"You wouldn't know a law if you saw one," Jeff said. "And don't strong-arm any of those men until you're very, very sure of your ground. That also goes for me. Get out the welcome mat, Nicky dear."

Jeff frowned. "He doesn't want to see me."

It wasn't until he reached the club that he got the idea. The blonde hat check girl smiled at him pleasantly. "Meggs is going to doctor your concrete so it won't pass the State inspectors. They'll have all the bad places marked and the inspectors will knock you off the day before the track opens and clamp down on you as being unsafe."

"You made three hundred dollars, darling," he said. "Thanks."

"That ought to put Mr. Meggs right in his own concrete bag," Jeff told Jimmy when they reached the bar. "What was it you told me about throwing one-hundred-dollar bills away to blonde hat check gals?"

CHAPTER XVII.

A NEW WRINKLE.

ROBERTA LANE called Jeff at eight o'clock the next morning. "My dear, how I suffer for your sake," she said.

"What's the matter," he laughed, "catch cold running around in the night air?"

"My head is the exact size of the Perisphere," she reported.

"How did you get along with our friend?" Jeff asked.

"You'll never know what an impression I made," she said. "The man simply overwhelmed me with attention. We didn't get home until four in the morning and I had to do a Joe Louis to get home at all."

"Sounds interesting," Jeff chuckled. "Did you learn anything besides a few new holds?"

"Is that a nice way to talk to a girl who not only risks her honor for you, but leaves an eight o'clock call?" she asked plaintively. "You should show a little more concern for me, darling."

"Come, come my sweet little candidate for the steam room, what transpired in the way of newsworthy events concerning racetracks?" Jeff asked.

"Well, after about ten highballs I noted a slight glaze in Mr. Nordoff's eye and decided that I could put a coy question or so to him while we wrestled on one of those little love seats in the Creek Club," Bobbie reported. "So I asked him if there was any real good reason why I shouldn't invest my money because it seemed the track was being built so fast and all. He said the track wouldn't be finished in the first place and if it was, it wouldn't open because a suit would be brought on the petition of citizens of Coral County and an injunction obtained to delay the opening so that the license would be lost."

"Right," Jeff said eagerly. "Did he tell you the basis of the suit?"

"It seems Coral County, wherever that is, never ratified the pari mutuel act and all other types of gambling are specifically forbidden by law. Thus being on record as an anti-gambling county, and having never ratified the pari mutuel act, the county attorney feels justified in bringing suit against you. Or he will when the right time comes and all the petitions are signed."

"Thanks, Bobbie, you're a darling," Jeff said. "Continue to romp and frivol with our racing commissioner."

"Oh!" she bleated. "Not without a suit of armor . . . Jeff, be reasonable."

"Just remember never to lead with your right," he advised her, hanging up. To Jimmy he said: "Get the car. We're calling on Mr. Sutherland with trouble to discuss."

SUTHERLAND advised him that the combine never could make such a move stick, but that they could hold up the opening of the track by bringing the action before a friendly judge forty-eight hours before the opening date.

"Then we'd miss our opening and lose our license," Jeff said. "Very simple."

Sutherland agreed. "I'll do my best to block it, but I wish there was some other way."

Jeff got Drake on the phone. "How far is our most southerly boundary from the county line?" he asked.

"Twenty feet," Drake told him.

"Who owns the next tract south and does it extend over the county line?" was Jeff's next question.

"A man named Silvers in the real estate business and it does extend over the line," Drake told him.

"Thank you," Jeff said. "See you later." He hung up and turned to Sutherland. "If we ran the track itself over the line by simply broadening the backstretch, would that change the situation?"

Sutherland slapped his hands together. "Of course it would. That would make it inter-county and under State jurisdiction. However, you'd have to pay taxes in both counties and take out a license here. I don't think you could get a license from the county supervisors."

"I'm not worried about that," Jeff said. "I've got a great press agent steaming up the local public and I'll put him to work on that angle. Also, we'll let it be known that the government has moved in—and why. They'll be scared silly."

"It's worth a shot," Sutherland said.

Jeff directed him to buy the land. Two hours later Sutherland called him, quite agitated.

"It's been sold already," he reported. "Logan bought it this morning."

Logan certainly missed no tricks, Jeff reflected. "Get hold of some other lawyer," he instructed Sutherland after thinking this new problem over for a few moments. "One you can trust, but who isn't particularly known to be a friend of yours. Ask him to find out the price on behalf of an unidentified client."

It was two hours before they had an answer: "Fifty thousand dollars," Sutherland reported, after a brief telephonic conversation. "No sale until the day after the opening of Coral Island Park."

"I wonder what kind of a profit that represents to Logan," Jeff inquired. Sutherland had the other attorney make a brief investigation and found out that until several days ago the property had been listed for sale at twenty-five thousand dollars. It was, he reported, all the land was worth because of its somewhat isolated position on the outskirts of Coral Island City.

"I imagine Logan might be tempted if he had an opportunity to sell at fifty thousand dollars to someone he considered to be harmless," Jeff remarked. He called a theatrical agent in New York. "Can you get hold of someone who has a resemblance in manner to W. C. Fields?" he asked. "The role I want him to play is that of a small business man from some place in upstate New York who has inherited a small fortune and sold out his business. He is to come to Florida to invest—build a luxurious trailer camp. He is to be one of those fellows who looks as if he is ripe for the taking—full of big talk and hot air; apparently a harmless man with grandiose ideas. One sure to be roped in by someone."

The agent assured him that he could find a man to fill the bill and Jeff told him to have the actor take the first plane south, explaining as much of the situation as was adivsable.

"He will come first to Senator Sutherland's office," Jeff instructed, "and there he will be taken in tow by an attorney and a press agent who will explain his duties to him. It's all perfectly legal. I just have to get hold of some land that wouldn't be sold to me direct."

To Sutherland he explained, "This actor will be so anxious to get to work losing his money that he can't wait—wants immediate action. The press agent, a friend of our own man, will give out the interviews that he's there to build a magnificent new trailer camp such as the world has never seen before. A real estate man will be jock-

eyed unknowingly into showing him the tract next to Coral Island Park and he will determine that is the one he wants. An immediate offer will be made of fifty thousand dollars when Logan sets that figure, but he will want it right away or he'll threaten to buy another parcel which is obviously better suited to his needs and, possibly, cheaper."

Sutherland smiled. "It might work if we're careful not to let the cat out of the bag."

"I'll leave that to you and Jimmy Ranger," Jeff said. "No one will be following him when he first comes to town and, after the initial interview here, neither of you are to have anything to do with him except through this other lawyer—by telephone. Have the lawyer accompany him on all his trips to see Logan and be sure to set a figure for the attorney's fee that will be sufficiently high to protect us against leaks."

Sutherland stared at him. "All right, but where are you going?" he asked.

Jeff scribbled a few figures on a piece of paper. "I'll have to go to New York," he said. "This throws our finances all out of gear. We need more money. We'll have to dig into the money we set aside for the mutuel guarantee to put this thing over. And the construction costs are running higher than expected. I estimate we'll have to have one hundred thousand dollars more."

When Jimmy Ranger heard this he stared at Jeff: "Where are you to get the money, Cash?"

Jeff crossed his fingers. "From Mr. Phineas T. Gardiner—I hope."

Prior to leaving for New York, however, he had a small chore to attend to. Accompanied by a junior member of Sutherland's law firm, who was armed with the proper papers, he called upon Johnny Rock, who operated Tamiami's largest dog track as well as several others in the Midwest and New England.

"Do you have a dollar in your pocket, Johnny?" he asked the small, quick-eyed little dog-racing man.

"I might be able to dig up a dollar, Cash," said Johnny, who had known Cash when he was involved in losing money in the dog track business in Chicago. He smiled and pulled a handful of change from his pocket. "I have a dollar and twenty-six cents as a matter of fact."

"A dollar is sufficient, Johnny," Jeff grinned. "I am going to make you an unprecedented offer for the small sum of one dollar, one hundred cents, ten dimes or twenty nickels—an opportunity of a lifetime."

"I can imagine it," Johnny said wryly. "What's up your sleeve besides your arm?"

Jeff shot his cuffs. "Nothing whatever," Jeff said. "This is my Santa Claus day. For the sum of one dollar I will give you a sixty-day option to purchase Coral Island Park and all the real estate thereof, the equipment therein, etc. The price is two hundred and fifty thousand dollars—the grandstand alone is worth twice that and cost us more because of the rush we've been in. It would make a beautiful grandstand for a dog park. Of course, you don't need all the real estate so that would be pure hay. You could make a tourist camp or a real estate development or something out of the section you didn't need."

Rock leaned forward, interested: "What's the gag?" he demanded.

"No gag, except that if the track

opens on the date set by the commission, your option becomes null and void, Jeff said. "On the other hand, if the track doesn't open—you have the right to purchase it for a bargain price."

Rock shook his head. "I don't follow you, but I don't see where I can lose anything more than the price of a couple of drinks."

"You can't," Jeff said. "Not only would you have a dog track surpassing anything in the country, but if you wanted to sell it to somebody for a horse track later on, you could turn a very nice profit. In case you would like to buy the place at fifty thousand dollars less I have a contract here which specifies that you guarantee to buy Coral Island Park for one hundred and fifty thousand dollars in exactly ninety days in the event that we do not meet our opening date—said contract becoming immediately binding on both you and ourselves if we don't open. If we do, it's off. You have to post a seventy-five-thousand-dollar guarantee with the First City Bank."

Johnny Rock viewed Jeff suspiciously. "This sounds like a Trojan Horse park to me," he said. "I'll send for my lawyer."

The attorney assured him that both the option and the contract were perfectly in order; contained no trick clauses.

"O. K.," Johnny said. "I'll take the contract and post the guarantee. Right now. I know you've got a joker some place, but it can't hurt me."

"You're right on all counts," Jeff grinned.

When the papers were signed, the dog track owner looked at Jeff quizzically. "What's to prevent me from throwing in with the boys to stop you from opening that park?" he asked. "It would be to my advantage now."

Jeff laughed heartily. He knew Rock had been turning that over in his mind. "Johnny, my boy, if you can think of anything they haven't already thought of—go to it. Your 'John Henry' on that contract is more valuable to me right now than anything you may do against me."

CHAPTER XVIII.

UNEASY MONEY.

JEFF taxied from LaGuardia Field to Gardiner's office on Broad Street, where he was kept waiting for a half hour before Phineas would see him.

"I'm properly impressed with my unimportance," Jeff said, after having to exercise his persuasion on a secretary

and a confidential secretary and finally gaining Gardiner's office and walking a half block across the room to the huge, ornately-carved desk behind which the financier rested himself on his beefsteak-colored jowels.

"I don't know what you're selling, but I don't want any," Gardiner said, cordially. "If it's that racetrack I wouldn't touch it if you've discovered pitch blend on the place." He looked inordinately satisfied with himself for having had the good sense not to place any of the Gardiner funds in this hopeless venture. "Looks like you put yourself in the bag and asked the first passer-by to sew it up."

"You mean you don't think we're going to open?" Jeff asked.

"Not from what I hear and read in the papers," Gardiner said. "You bit off a bit too much this time."

"Then you'll be interested in what I have to say," Jeff said. "Practically giving me fifty thousand dollars."

"Humph," Gardiner said suspiciously.

Jeff sighed and shook his head. "It just seems I'm always trying to make money for you," he said. "And you insist on not taking it—as in Denver."

Gardiner grunted at this reminder he actually had once kicked Jeff's good money out the window. "Get on with your business," he said. "I haven't all day to waste on wild schemes."

"I just want you to take a short-term mortgage on our Coral Island Park and all its equipment," Jeff said. "Ninety days, six percent interest—flat."

"Never heard of such a thing in the first place," Gardiner said. "Second, I wouldn't touch it under any circumstances. Nothing doing. That place is going to blow higher than a kite. You wouldn't be here making such a proposition if you weren't in hot water up to your neck."

Jeff spread charts of statistics on the desk. "We have no creditors for the simple reason that nobody will give us any credit. The place is free and clear and almost a million dollars has been poured into it. In the event that we did not open, you, as holder of the first mortgage, could foreclose if we failed to meet the mortgage and interest. In that event, you would make exactly fifty thousand dollars."

"How do you figure that?" Gardiner asked, interested.

Jeff handed him the contract he had signed with Johnny Rock. "The day after your foreclosure becomes operative the park passes to Rock for one hundred and fifty thousand dollars," he said.

Gardiner picked up the sheets of statistics, photostatic copes of papers attesting to ownership of the property, etc., which Jeff had brought with him and began to pile into the mass of information, occasionally asking a question. He called his bank and requested that certain information be checked through the Tamiami and Coral Island City banks, sent secretaries on various errands having to do with verifying the information before him. At the end of an hour, during which he won Jeff's unqualified admiration for the manner in which the Wall Street speculator dived into a problem with imperturbable concentration, he looked up.

"What do you want—a certified check?"

AN hour later he checked with Jimmy Ranger on the telephone. "How are you and Sutherland making out with our actor?" he asked.

"The fellow they sent down here is

great," Jimmy said. "There was a big spread on him in the early editions of the papers and he's already contacted Logan, who agreed to sell but it isn't doing us any good. Logan insists on a clause that the property will not be sold or leased for thirty days. Naturally, our man couldn't say anything to that without raising suspicion."

Jeff thought this over for a few moments while Jimmy worried about the telephone bill. "Tell him to go ahead and buy. He's using his right name, isn't he?"

"Oh, yeah—the sale will be legal and the property his," Jimmy assured him. "We're protected, of course, but what good is it going to do under those circumstances."

Jeff's alert black eyes flashed with quick humor. "There's nothing to prevent him from giving us the property, is there?" he asked his assistant.

Jimmy read over the terms tentatively agreed to by Logan and the actor. "No, it just says 'guarantees not to sell or lease said property to any other individual or firm,'" he reported.

"O. K.," Jeff replied. "Now here's another piece of business for you—but first, have the anti-trust investigators from the Department of Justice arrived in town yet?"

"Yeah," Jimmy said. "They had Sutherland and myself on the grille for about four hours this afternoon and they were a little peeved about you leaving town, but I managed to soothe them."

"Good," Jeff said. "Get hold of our labor friend, Lew Carter, and have him contact the men he can trust in the cement mixers' local who are working for Meggs. Here's the idea: they're to locate the doctored cement and substitute good stuff for it; with the exception of enough for one piece of work which they'll put in the least vital position of those Meggs selects on the day he's going to run the bad stuff in. Roberta is trying to find out when that will be and, as she hasn't reported so far, it probably will be tomorrow. If any hitch occurs, get in touch with me, but I don't see any possibility of a slip because the rank and file in the cement crew are with us. Got it?"

"I catch, but then what?" Jimmy asked.

"Tell the D. J. men what you're doing and if one of them wants to put on overalls and work with one of the other crews—carpenters or some place where Meggs won't spot him. At least be sure they see the bad cement. It will give them something tangible to work on. That's sabotage in co-operation with a labor union and at the behest of a gangster and they ought to get something out of it as a starter. They wanted something concrete to get their teeth into and I can't think of anything better than cement."

Connly took the phone from Jimmy Ranger. "I've got something to report, too," he said. "There was a vacant office available next to Dr. McMitchell's office and we took it late yesterday and ran a dictaphone into his place. He called Lias today and passed along some information Mr. Drake had given Dallas Reid and which she had confided to McMitchell's wife."

Jeff's eyes lighted. "Great stuff, Jim," he exclaimed. "Keep on top of it. Did you search his office?"

"Yes, but we didn't find anything interesting," the private detective said. "However, there was one thing he said in the phone call he made to Lias that probably has some meaning. He demanded his I. O. U.'s and was very mad about it, saying Lias had promised

to give them to him the first thing on last Thursday morning."

Connly paused a moment and when Jeff, who was puzzling over this, said nothing, he added: "Does it strike any kind of a chord?"

"Well, he was in debt to Lias, but I more or less expected that," Jeff replied, puzzled by the suppressed excitement in Connly's voice. Suddenly he snapped his finger. "Thursday morning! That was the day after Carson Bishop died!"

"Exactly," Connly said. "I thought that was kind of interesting."

CHAPTER XIX.

WHAT, NO HORSES!

JIMMY RANGER met Jeff at the airport the next morning, wearing a broad grin. The district attorney is getting cold feet," he said. "I found out this morning that Steamboat Ginnis and Max Stein were released from the clink yesterday around noon and then picked up again last night and charged with felonious assault with intent to kill."

"Well, well," Jeff said, feeling more cheerful than he had at any time since he had gotten into this affair. "Matters progress. Has word, by any chance, gotten to the ears of the local authorities that the Federals are having a look into the contracting business in our fair city?"

Jimmy nodded. "If it hasn't they must be deaf, dumb and illiterate," he replied. He shoved a newspaper at Jeff. "I took it upon myself to have our press agent drop a few hints to the press, which was very curious about why there was no strike when the Lias boys called for a vote."

Jeff read a scream headline in the *Tribune*: "U. S. Investigating Building Racket, Report." Reading further he learned that "United States Attorney Higgins refused to either confirm or deny the report, but it was considered significant that the non-racketeer dominated leaders and the rank and file of the membership of local unions for the first time are exhibiting open defiance of the Lias elements and, as yet, at least, there have been no reprisals."

Jeff nodded. This was a good move. "Very neat, Jimmy." He looked around. "I assume you were followed out here."

"I was," Jimmy admitted. "I tried to duck him but he stuck like a leech —the little guy with the mustache dressed like a Filipino houseboy who just inherited a million."

Jeff looked directly at the shadow and laughed. "Come on," he said. "We'll give him a shock. Drive directly to Higgins' office."

The little Federal attorney all but rubbed his hands with glee when he saw Jeff. "I hope you noticed my fine Italian hand in the re-arrest of those two gunmen."

Jeff laughed. "I suspected that something of the kind might have come to be," he said. "You dropped a hint to the local prosecutor. Thanks."

"I have a suggestion to make," Higgins said. A big, raw-boned man named Hanaman was announced and Higgins had him shown in. "Mr. Hanaman is in charge of the investigation for the anti-monopoly division," he said. "He and I thought—"

Jeff interrupted. "You want to make a deal with Steamboat and Stein."

"Exactly," Higgins said. "I thought I was one up on you. What do you think?"

"Go ahead," Jeff said. "I think it's

a great idea. I'll drop the attempted murder charge against them if they'll turn State's evidence on the building racket."

"Splendid!" Hanaman said. "There's one thing I'd like to have you do for us that's very important. It will tie in perfectly with the case we're sure we can build up here. I want you to call off this idea of substituting good cement for the doctored stuff that Lias is going to run in on you. Incidentally, they're not trying it today, we know."

Jeff considered this swiftly. He wanted to co-operate in every possible way with these men as he was deeply indebted to Higgins and to the Justice Department for their presence, but this request didn't look good to him.

"You're asking an awful lot," he said. "I'd rather not if it can be avoided. After all, if they managed to put that bad stuff in in any quantity I wouldn't be able to replace it in time and the State inspectors would not permit me to open. I'd be defeating myself and Drake and I would be out a million bucks. I don't see why it wouldn't be just as well the other way."

"Too much chance of a slip," Hanaman said. "Lias or his men might get the wind up if the switch was made." He took out a plan of the grandstand which he had obtained from Drake. "Here's the only vital spot that would be affected. Now, both myself and my assistant are engineers. With a slight additional cost, the place where this defective material will be poured can be braced with steel girders. They won't look good, but they'll guarantee temporary safety. We've worked it out, and the job can be done the morning of the day you open, if necessary. Naturally, we can't do anything officially, but if Higgins dropped a hint indirectly

Drake stood speechless as Jeff explained his maneuverings for the fifty thousand dollars.

to the State department involved, I'm sure you wouldn't have any trouble there. I imagine that somebody there is vulnerable and won't be anxious to press points too far."

Higgins winked. "I'll drop a hint that will sound like a demolition bomb. I don't think you'll have any trouble. I know just where to drop it."

"O. K.," Jeff chuckled. "I'll call Drake and Carter and tell them about it."

Drake listened silently while Jeff explained this move. "O. K., he said. His voice was dispirited. "The petition asking the county attorney to take legal action to prevent the opening of the track was presented to him this morning with ten thousand signatures, all registered voters and representing a majority in the county according to the late registration figures. You know there are about ten times as many people

here in the winter as actually vote in elections."

"What's the county attorney going to do?" Jeff asked. "Bring immediate action—we expected that. So what?"

"Bringing action this afternoon," Drake replied. "Of course, Sutherland's firm is preparing to contest it, but the judge who will hear it is one of Manley's men."

"Don't worry about it," Jeff said. He turned to Ranger: "How's the deal to buy that property coming?"

"It's going through this afternoon," Jimmy informed him. Jeff relayed this information to Drake.

"You still have to get a county license to operate a racetrack in Tamiami County," Drake pointed out. "Personally, I don't see how you're going to do it and the horsemen who made reservations out here don't either. Ten more stables pulled out today. We haven't got enough horsemen here to fill out a card and more are planning to leave. I think Logan is putting pressure on them, too."

Jeff received this belt in the midriff in silence. He hadn't been giving much thought to this side of the problem.

"What's the matter?" asked Jimmy, when Jeff put down the telephone.

"I made the unfortunate mistake of forgetting that you need horses to operate a racetrack," Jeff said. "Get me a *Racing Form*."

CHAPTER XX.

CASH FEINTS FOR TIME.

JEFF settled himself in the car and consulted the *Racing Form* while Jimmy steered the car toward Tamiami Park, where the first meet of the winter was drawing to a close.

"Ah," Jeff said, after running through the list of horses entered for the day.

Jimmy looked at him out of the corner of his eye. "Find an owner you know?" he asked. Jeff nodded. Jimmy inspected the rear view mirror. "You want that Lias man behind us to know where we're going?"

Jeff snapped his fingers. "Absolutely not," he said. "Forgot all about him. Step on the gas fast and squeeze ahead of those cars in front of us."

Jimmy swung the car into the oncoming traffic lane and sent it roaring past several cars, drawing curses from drivers coming from the opposite direction, then eased in to a position alongside a street car awaiting a light change.

Jeff stepped from the automobile and joined several people getting into the car. From a window, he said: "See you later. Check with Connly and find out how things are going on the McMitchell matter."

The light changed. Jimmy stepped on the gas and the car sped away. Five cars passed and then the Lias henchman, gunning his motor frantically, roared past the street car and swung into its tracks in quick pursuit of Jimmy.

Jeff grinned and got out at the next corner, stepping into a parked cab, which pulled away just as Lias' man returned, circled the street car and came up alongside it, inspecting the passengers.

At the track he found old George Mathews, one of the most honorable and cleverest of the gypsy owners and a veteran of the turf who enjoyed universal respect. Indeed, so successful had he been in building up his own stable and, from time to time, training the horses of millionaire sportsmen, that he could hardly be termed a gypsy. He

was in a sort of class by himself.

"Took yourself a big bite, Cash, when you dealt yourself in on Coral Island Park," he said, after greeting Jeff warmly. He looked at his visitor shrewdly, adding: "Cash, you've been a good friend to me a couple of times and I'd do almost anything to help you, but don't bring me any of that Coral Island Park trouble. That's too much for an old codger like me. All I know is horses."

Jeff grinned. "That's just it, George. And that's what I need—a man who knows horses. How'd you like to manage the track for me—at least twenty-five thousand dollars a year."

Mathews didn't want to manage the track. He complained that he was in no financial position to take the risk, pointing out that if he moved from Tamiami Park at present he would place himself in bad with Barber and Logan; that it would be almost impossible to convince horsemen who already had shipped to Coral Island Park to stay unless they were stuck and no one else would move there with things as they were. Jeff told him the whole story and Mathews was impressed. Finally, he shook his head, however: "Jeff, you know I'd like to help you," he said. "Turning you down makes me feel like a heel, but I've got a family and three kids in college right now. I just can't afford to take such a risk. If it wasn't for that I'd do it in a minute."

Jeff sighed. "O. K., George," he said. "I'll pay you the twenty-five thousand dollars on the barrel head. Does that make a difference?"

Mathews stared at him: "You must be confident you're going to put the place across," he said, slowly. "O. K. —I'll take it, but if you want me to get enough horsemen over there to fill out your cards for the first ten days of the meet you'll have to give me another twenty-five thousand dollars so I can distribute it around. That's not strictly on the up and up, but I'll see that every man thinks it's just a personal matter. They won't talk. You won't have the best horses, but there are a lot of gypsies who'd rally around with their expenses offset or partially offset and a chance at fair purses."

Jeff sighed again: "O. K.—you get the dough."

Mathews grinned. "And you get the horses."

Jimmy Ranger stared at him when Jeff relayed this news. "You must be bats," he said. "We haven't got the mutuel guarantee . . . again. That leaves you forty thousand short."

"You can't run a horse park without horses," Jeff pointed out. He felt tired. "One headache at a time. . . . Where's Connly?"

Jimmy shook his head. "Couldn't find him, but Sutherland wants to see you at his office."

Sutherland viewed Jeff quizzically. "Well, we now have the tract of land adjoining the track. Push the fence on your backstretch to the rear and you're racing in two counties; but then what? If the county supervisors of Tamiami County don't give you the permit we're just where we started. The restraining order was issued by Judge Roll a half hour ago."

Jeff shrugged. "I'll think about the supervisors later. You sound them out," he turned to Jimmy. "Have Drake push the backstretch fence across the county line. I've got to get that mutuel money."

"How about tapping Gardiner again?" Jimmy Ranger asked hopefully. Jeff looked at him in disgust.

"You don't by any chance consider Mr. Gardiner a philanthropist, do you?" he asked. "If the track does open, Gardiner makes six thousand dollars; if it doesn't open, he makes fifty thousand dollars. How do you think he's going to feel about saving our bacon?"

They looked at him. "Well?" Jimmy asked.

Jeff shrugged his shoulders again. "You never can tell; there may be a little sweetness and light around Tamiami. I'll try the banks."

The banks were strictly not interested. Their attitude was sympathetic, but it was apparent they felt Mr. Gorman was the head man at a wake and they wanted no financial interest in the corpse. . . .

Jeff telephoned Drake from the hotel. "I'm going to New York again," he said. "Hold down the fort." As he turned away from the phone booth, Roberta approached him. He ignored her, his shadow having picked him up again.

"Cash," she said, excitedly, paying no heed to his attempt to walk by her without recognition. "They're going to put the bad cement in tomorrow."

He brushed roughly past her, muttering "Shut up, you dope." She stared after him open mouthed and Jeff, looking over his shoulder, was perturbed to see that the Lias man was observing her closely. The man, he knew, had not been near enough to them to overhear what was said, but it was hardly possible that he had not seen.

PRIOR to leaving for the airport, he scribbled a note to Jimmy: "Tell Roberta to go over to Palm Beach if she notices any attempt on the part of Nordoff to pump her. And keep an eye on her."

All other sources having failed, including Gardiner, who had been delighted to hear the bad news, Jeff, at three o'clock the next afternoon, turned into a hotel on Broadway and asked for Abe Hasset, the gambler.

"Right behind you," a flat voice remarked, and Jeff turned to find Abe staring at him expressionlessly. The man had a hawk face, dark complexioned and immobile. His mouth was a straight line, except when he talked. Then he twisted it to one side and spoke from the corner of it.

"Come on in the bar and have a buttermilk," he said, being familiar with Jeff's liquid preferences from many an all-night poker session. Jeff trusted Hasset about as far as he could throw a house, but he couldn't be particular with whom he dealt now. Hasset led the way to a secluded corner of the bar and put his hand in his pocket withdrawing a flat package of one-thousand-dollar bills. "Forty of 'em," he said, tossing the money on the table between them. "That what you lookin' for?"

Jeff stared at the money. "Yes," he said, suspiciously. "How did you know?"

Hasset smiled thinly. "After what's been happenin' down south you don't think you can go walkin' around this town all day askin' for forty grand without people hearin' about it, do you?" he asked. "Why didn't you come to me first?"

"Well, I knew you and Bill Barber had been pretty chummy on occasions and I didn't know whether you'd want to give it to me," Jeff said, watching Hasset closely. This was too easy.

"So Bill and I have had a few deals," Hasset said. He shrugged his shoulders. "That don't make me his wet nurse. Business is business."

Jeff counted the money. "What do you want for this?"

Hasset smiled again, more warmly this time. "Just twenty percent of the joint."

Jeff threw the money down. "What do you think I am, a sap? I've only got twenty-five percent myself."

Hasset looked at him skeptically. "Yeah?"

"Yeah," said Jeff. "I'll give you ten—"

Hasset shook his head. "I'm making the terms; you ain't making nothin'. You're in the bag. But I've always liked you, Cash, so I'll give you a break—fifteen percent."

"Make it twelve and it's a deal," Jeff replied.

Hasset picked up the money. "No dice."

Jeff got up. "Well, thanks for the buttermilk," he said. He started to walk off, although the effort almost killed him.

"Wait a minute," Hasset said. "Fourteen."

They settled at thirteen percent, although Hasset protested the number was unlucky. "Just make sure it isn't unlucky for me," Jeff said, still slightly suspicious over the entire transaction, although he could figure no angle to it.

"I'll make out the papers, just as soon as I can get in touch with my attorney," Jeff said. "And I'll be back for the money later. Hang onto it until I get the papers in order. You want your lawyer to get in touch with mine?"

Hasset waved his hand. "Naw, never mind about that," he said. "Your word's good with me. I know you want to get back down there to Coral Island Park as quick as you can so go ahead. I want you to be sure you get that track open. I got an interest in it now. Just give me an I. O. U. for the dough. Or better yet, I'll wire it down there

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to the racing commission myself—right now. That'll be my receipt."

Jeff decided that he had misjudged the gambler. "That's swell, Abe," he said, heartily. "This puts everything right in the bag."

"You said it, boy," Hasset declared. "Right in the bag! Get back down there and sew it up tight."

"The mutuel guarantee is posted," he told Jimmy Ranger over the long-distance telephone. "What's with you?"

"The two Lias men, Steamboat Ginnis and Max Stein, agreed to the deal," Jimmy reported, excitedly. "They sang to Hanaman."

"Have they moved to indict Lias?" Jeff asked.

"Not yet," Jimmy reported. "They're going to wait until the bad concrete is poured tomorrow and then pull in Meggs and the Lias-controlled men in the unions. But that's not the big news. Connly's really got something."

The private detective came on the wire. "Listen, Cash—we got hold of this guy McMitchell's bank book and his checking account statement. He made two entries totaling forty thousand dollars the day after Bishop died," Connly reported. "Tie that up with that talk about the I. O. U.'s Lias was supposed to deliver him and what do you have?"

Jeff's jaw set in a hard line and his eyes became cold as ice. "Maybe we don't have a heart attack?" he said. "What else did you find out?"

"He's been living way over his head trying to keep up with his wife's friends and gambling heavily to try to fill out the difference between income and outgo—losing," Connly said. "He booked with Lias and did a lot of his gambling at the tables there. Lias, until a month ago, thought his wife had money and he was very mad when he found out she didn't."

"I see," Jeff said slowly. "He cut him off from gambling and then, discovering they were friends of Bishop and Drake, he all of a suddden got friendly again and let him play some more, huh?"

"That's it," Connly said.

"Have you told this to the Federal men?"

The detective said he hadn't.

"Inform them," Jeff said. "Maybe he was just a pipeline, but I want to know. I'll call Mrs. Bishop. I want her to give permission to have the body disinterred and an autopsy performed. It ties up with the Federal case, so get them to co-operate. The more things we can spring on Lias at once, the better."

"O. K., Connly said. "See you tomorrow."

THE next morning when Jeff got back to Tamiami, the bad concrete had already been laid and the Department of Justice men, assisted by the F. B. I., were quietly picking up the Lias racketeers and the union men who had been playing ball with them.

"We've got a real case," Hanaman told Jeff. "A special session of the Federal grand jury will be summoned in a day or two. We're going to arrest Meggs tonight. He's off on a fishing trip, probably so he will be able to deny he had any connection with the bad concrete after the State inspectors do their stuff—as he thinks they will."

Jeff looked at Hanaman in quick alarm and the Federal investigator laughed. "Don't worry. We've taken care of that angle."

"How about the body?" he asked.

"The autopsy will be performed to-

morrow," Hanaman said.

Jeff went to his hotel and summoned Sutherland and Drake: "We're all set now except for one thing: that permit to operate a track in Tamiami County. Did you sound out the supervisors?"

Sutherland nodded. "They're scared, but stubborn. Two of them are honest and will vote for it. Two others are in up to their necks and they'd like to make peace, but they're afraid Lias might retaliate in some horrible way. The other, quite frankly, is expecting to go to jail before this all blows over and figures he might as well make as much as he can while the sun shines. His vote could swing it but he wants twenty thousand dollars."

Jeff shook his head. "We haven't got a nickel to spend on that stuff," he said. Turning to Jimmy Ranger he said: "Get hold of Roberta Lane, maybe she has some new dope." He turned his attention to Sutherland again. "How much time do we have on this thing?"

"I can get the restraining order against the opening of the park vacated as soon as you have a permit to operate in both counties," he said. "That makes it a State proposition and it's only a matter of going before the judge this afternoon or tomorrow morning. It can't be blocked if we have a permit."

They were still discussing this matter when Jimmy reported that he couldn't find Roberta Lane. Jeff was alarmed. He sent for Connly and put his men on her trail. No trace of her was found. She had left the hotel that morning after receiving a telephone call and had not returned.

"Maybe she went out to Tamiami Park with Nordoff?" Jeff suggested. Connly shook his head. "I checked with the Pinkertons there."

The telephone interrupted them.

"Gorman?" a thick, harsh voice said. Jeff recognized Lias as the speaker.

"Yes," he said grimly.

"I got your dame," Lias said. "I found out who she was and what she was doin'. I found out, too, you like her pretty much. A lot. You got me in a spot, see, but I ain't goin' to no jail. You call off them Federal dicks and iron this thing out clean or you ain't goin' to like this dame much after I get through fixin' her up. See? And don't tell nobody."

The receiver clicked. Jeff started to call Lias at the Golden Pheasant, then paused to think.

"News of Bobbie?" Jimmy asked. Jeff nodded and told them about it. Connly and Ranger and Drake were all for going to the Golden Pheasant with G-Men and ripping the place apart.

Jeff shook his head. "Don't say a word to Hanaman about this," he said. He spoke to Connly. "What time does Lias generally get to his place in the evening?"

"Eight o'clock," Connly reported.

Jeff spoke to Sutherland. "Senator, I don't care what you tell them or how you arrange it, but see that those three county supervisors who won't play ball are at the Golden Pheasant at nine o'clock."

JEFF walked into the Golden Pheasant alone. At a table he saw Sutherland with three strangers whom he knew, from Sutherland's quiet nod, to be the county supervisors.

"A table for one, sir?" the head-waiter asked.

"Tell Lias Cash Gorman's here," Jeff said. "I want to see him. I'll be at the bar."

A heavy-set man with a cruel face

approached him a moment later. "Come on, mugg," he said. "The boss'll see you."

Jeff followed the gunman into Lias' private office. The door was closed and the gunman, his revolver in his hand, sat down with his back to it.

Lias stared coldly at Jeff through his piggy little eyes. "You do what I told you, wise guy?" the uncouth, obscenely fat gangster demanded harshly.

"I came here to make a deal," Jeff said.

"I ain't making no deal except the one I told you about," Lias said. "Call off them Washington dicks, spring the boys and drop them charges against my union guys and you get the dame back." He leaned forward across the desk behind which he sat and made a clawing motion with his hands. "Don't do it and she'll die, see? But slow."

Jeff looked at his watch.

"This building is surrounded by G-Men," he said. "Every exit is blocked. There are four Federal officers sitting in the dining room in a position commanding this door right now."

The bodyguard by the door jumped to his feet threateningly and Lias half rose in his chair, supporting his bulk on his hands as he leaned across the desk, hissing: "You told 'em I kidnaped the dame!" His voice rose shrilly. "Well, she won't live, see—if I'm gonna burn—she's dyin', and you, too." He reached for a gun.

Jeff held up his hand. "I didn't tell them about the kidnaping," he said sharply. Lias looked at him with his face set in maniacal lines. "What d'ya mean? What are them cops doin' around here, then."

"You're going to be indicted on a conspiracy charge in connection with the labor racket," Jeff said. "I told them you had found out about it and were going to try to escape. My man, Ranger, is outside there with them now. If I don't leave here with Miss Lane in thirty minutes, he'll tell them about the kidnaping and they'll come in and get you. And they'll be blasting when they come. You're going to jail—but you always have a chance with good lawyers. But lawyers can't save you on a kidnaping charge. You'll hang."

Lias' face went pasty white. "See if them government dicks and this guy's bodyguard are out there," he said to his henchman. The man opened the door and came back. "Yeah, two F. B. I. men are there and there are two other guys with them."

"How do I know you'll level with me in the kidnaping charge," Lias asked.

"You don't know," Jeff said. "That's the chance you'll have to take, but I'm telling you the truth. I don't give a damn about you. You're going to jail anyway. All I want is to get Bobbie Lane back and open my track."

Lias hesitated and then nodded his head toward the gunman, who spoke briefly over the telephone in a voice too low for Jeff to catch. Lias watched him and he watched the minute hand on his watch.

"Twenty-five minutes," he said.

There was a call on the house phone. Lias took it and then nodded his huge head at Jeff. "She's outside at a table with two of the boys," he snarled. Then he began to curse, drooling at the mouth in his frustrated anger. Jeff opened the door, but did not step through until, with infinite relief, he saw Bobbie Lane sitting at a table flanked by two muscle men.

Smiling, he hurried to her side, telling the Lias men: "Scram, you bums."

She was pale and her hand, when he took it in hers, was trembling. "Oh, Jeff, I was so frightened," she said. "Thanks, darling." He ordered her a drink. "Everything's O. K. now," he said. "Buck up."

When she was feeling more composed she began to tell him what had happened, but he forestalled her. "I'll see you later, honey," he said. "I've got a little business to do. Sit right there and I'll send Jimmy over to keep you company."

He made his way to the table where Higgins and the Federal officers were sitting. He chatted with them for a few minutes, pointing out Sutherland and the three county commissioners to them. They looked at the county commissioners, who noted the observation uneasily and then Jeff made his way over to Sutherland's table, where he was introduced to the county officials.

"I've just been talking to Higgins," he said, somewhat unnecessarily, as they had been watching the course of that conversation with growing alarm as Jeff had repeatedly looked at them while speaking. "He said the matter is out of his hands. However—" Jeff paused before continuing, with the utmost sincerity, another falsehood, "Hanaman and I are working hand in glove on this matter, of course, and he will support me. In the event that I get a license to operate a racetrack in Tamiami County as well as Coral County and thus can open tomorrow, the Federal investigators will overlook any offleads which might be suggestive of an alliance between Lias, the criminal union elements, the monopolistic contractors and the county supervisors. Otherwise—" He spread his hands,

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palms upward and shrugged his shoulders.

The three politicians, pale beneath their customary well-fed rosiness, looked at each other in mingled hope and alarm.

"You won't have to worry about that permit, Mr. Gorman," one of them said finally. "We'll call a special session of the board and grant it tomorrow morning."

Jeff smiled. "Let's make it tonight," he suggested. "Right now. I'll go with you. I can't sleep when I'm nervous and, without that permit, I'd be very nervous and apt to say something to Hanaman that you would regret."

CHAPTER XXI.

SHOWDOWN.

A HUNDRED American flags atop the grandstand, at the entrances, over the clubhouse and the paddock floated the Stars and Stripes out in a soft breeze. Gay coral and gold pennants, Drake's racing colors, gaily flaunted their bright hues from scores of places. The great, modernistic grandstand was packed with festive race fans come to see the opening of the park "that would never be built" and pay tribute to its courageous builders. Will Drake was a popular hero. Wherever he appeared, he was received with cheers. The public, always with the underdog, was delighted with his victory. Jeff, who was known only to a few, received no cheers, but his quick smile lit his face continuously as he heard people ask: "I wonder where Cash Gorman is? Which one is he?"

From their office atop the clubhouse, Jeff and Drake looked out over the park with proud, triumphant eyes. The landscaping was shaggy and spotted with brown and white patches of sand where grass or flowers should have been, but that didn't bother them. There would probably be very little vegetation at all left at the end of the day, anyway—so great was the crowd.

"Twenty-three thousand already," Drake reported, twenty minutes before the first race of the inaugural card was scheduled to start. "And look at those cars."

Traffic was backed up in a solid mass in both directions on the Marine Highway and the Inside Road to the west of the track was equally jammed.

Drake stuck out his big hand. "We done it," he grinned.

Old George Mathews clasped Drake's hand and Jeff put his over both of theirs. "I never thought I'd see this, Cash," the old horseman said. "We've got a winner."

Drake laughed. "I never thought I'd see it until Jeff showed up," he said.

Jeff looked at them both quizzically. "I never thought I'd see it at all—as late as last night, if the truth must be known," he said.

The opening ceremonies, in which the Governor participated, and Dallas Reid did the photographic honors, were over and the first race run; the attendance swelled to twenty-nine thousand and the horses were at the post for the start of the second race when Jeff observed a commotion at the starting gate. Officials gathered. The jockeys gaped open mouthed. Judges came down out of the stands and Jeff, who had just come from the office, pushed through the crowd as swiftly as possible.

"What's the matter here?" he demanded when he reached the group of excited officials.

"This race cannot be run," a fat, florid man informed Jeff.

"What?"

"You heard me—say, who are you anyway?" the fat man asked. Jeff looked at his "official" badge. "I'm Gorman," he said. "Who the devil are you?"

"I'm an inspector from the State racing commission," the fat man said importantly. He smirked. "I'm sorry, Mr. Gorman, but I've just received instructions that this race nor any other race on the card can be allowed to proceed until I receive further instructions from Commissioner Nordoff."

"Why?"

"Search me," the man shrugged, but from the expression on his face Jeff knew very well that the man was thoroughly familiar with whatever it was that had happened. "You'll have to ask Nordoff."

"Can you hold the horses at the post?" Jeff asked the presiding judge. "There must be some mistake."

The judge nodded. "I'll delay the race as long as possible, Mr. Gorman. Do you have any idea what this is all about?"

Jeff shook his head. "Where's Nordoff?" Jeff asked.

At that moment Jeff was paged on the loudspeaker system as being wanted in the office.

"I guess Commissioner Nordoff is up talking to that other wise guy," the racing commission inspector said. "I'll be seein' you around—if you're going to the races when Flamingo Park opens."

Jeff flashed him a scornful look. "I'll remember that," he hurled over his shoulder as he made for the clubhouse. Pushing his way through the milling, excited crowd and ignoring the scores of questions flung at him by people who had seen him come off the track, Jeff finally attained the office. Drake met him at the door, his face white. "Hasset's withdrawn the mutuel guarantee. Unless we can get it up we've got to call the card off and with only one race run we're licked—for the season."

"The rat," Jeff said. "Where is he? Did you try his hotel?"

Drake nodded. "I'm having him paged now . . . over the public address system."

Jeff snapped his fingers. "Forget him," he said. "He sold out to Barber and Logan—where's Nordoff. Is he up here?"

The racing commissioner detached himself from the crowd in the office lounge at this mention of his name and Drake introduced him to Jeff.

"I'm terribly sorry about this, Mr. Gorman," he said. He was a lean, cavernous-faced man and he presently had a phony look of sympathy on his face which reminded Jeff of an undertaker with a stake in the corpse. "Of course, I have no alternative."

"You mean we have to get the forty thousand dollars up in cash or no dice?" Jeff asked. Nordoff nodded.

"How about my personal note? Or Drake's? Or both? Guaranteed by our holding in the plant?" Jeff asked.

"It must be cash or a certified check," Nordoff said. "I can't express my sorrow about such an unfortunate circumstance. Believe me, I've never had a more unpleasant duty."

"I can imagine," Jeff said brusquely, visions of one hundred and twenty-five thousand dollars of his own money and all of Drake's fortune folding up for the want of forty thousand dollars. If he didn't get it up, he'd be flat broke within an hour. He waved Nordoff impatiently toward a corner. "Sit down over there and do your crying—just keep out of my way." He turned on

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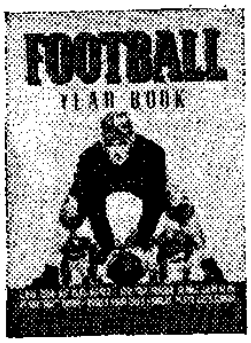

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Drake. "Get Phineas Gardiner on the telephone. Has Jimmy Ranger called in?"

Drake shook his head and hurried off to telephone Gardiner in New York. To a secretary Drake commanded: "Get me Mrs. Bishop's house."

He grabbed five stenographers, clerks and a couple of friends of Drake's and put them to work calling men he knew who might have forty thousand dollars in cash on hand, some of them as far away as San Francisco.

"Gardiner is out of town and can't be reached," Drake reported.

"The deuce he can't be reached," Jeff said. "Get back on that phone and tell 'em it's life and death."

The girl he had told to get the coroner's office on the phone reported the wire busy. Three long-distance connections were made, but Jeff was unable to raise a dime. He was just about to speak to the fourth man he was attempting to tap, when the stenographer reported that she had got through to Mrs. Bishop's house.

"Ranger there?" Jeff asked. Jimmy came on the phone.

"We were right," he said excitedly. "Just got through. Dr. Rainey says that death was caused by a brain hemorrhage induced by a sharp instrument thrust through the pupil of the eye."

"Is Captain Wilson there?" Jeff asked.

Wilson apparently had been listening on another extension. "Right here," the detective said. "Save your breath; I'm getting a warrant out for McMitchell immediately."

"Good boy," Jeff said. "Listen—I'm in a jam. Hasset withdrew his mutuel guarantee. I know a way to get it if you'll co-operate. Has something to do with the murder."

"Shoot," Wilson said. Jeff spoke to

him quickly for a moment. "O. K.," the captain agreed. "Get him on the phone."

"I still can't locate Gardiner," Drake shouted.

"Forget Gardiner," Jeff yelled. "Get the local police chief up here—I forget his name."

Drake looked at him in astonishment. "His name's Bates. What do you want *him* for?"

"Just call him on that P. A. system," Jeff snapped. "Hurry." He spoke to Captain Wilson on the phone. "Tell Ranger to get out here right away and have him inform the newspapers and radio stations."

Whirling around in his chair he dispatched two messengers after Bill Barber and J. Walter Logan, both of whom he knew to be somewhere in the clubhouse or at the paddock. He then summoned the Pinkerton chief. "Are you familiar with Dr. Fred McMitchell?" he asked in a low voice, a curious crowd having gathered around him by this time. The man nodded and Jeff drew him aside.

"Go out and get him—bring him here personally," he said. "Don't let him know what it's about, but don't let him get away. You might tell him Nordoff wants to speak to him—anything to get him here. Strictly for your own information, he's wanted for murder."

The Pinkerton's chief's eyes widened. "Good heavens," he exclaimed. "Dr. McMitchell?" He shook his head incredulously, then hurried off at Jeff's affirmative nod.

The Coral Island City police chief, Bates, arrived first. Jeff took him into Drake's private office and explained the situation to him. "Captain Wilson is on the wire now," Jeff said, handing the telephone to Bates. "He'll give you confirmation. They're putting out the request for McMitchell's arrest on the inter-county police wire now. I'll be in the outer office. When I nod to you, make the arrest, will you. I can't explain the situation right now, but it's very important that you co-operate with us in that manner in making the arrest and Mr. Drake and myself will both greatly appreciate it and we won't forget it."

Bates nodded. "Just so it's all legal, I'll arrest him any time you say. Is he going to come up here?"

"I've sent for him," Jeff replied. "He doesn't suspect a thing, I hope."

Jeff was right. McMitchell arrived a few minutes later with the Pinkerton chief. "What do you want, Rod?" McMitchell asked Nordoff. The racing commissioner looked at him blankly. "Nothing. Why?"

McMitchell turned angrily on the Pinkerton man. "I thought you told me Commissioner Nordoff wanted to see me."

Jeff interposed. "I wanted to see you, doctor," he said. His eyes were diamond sharp and narrowed to slits. He put a contemptuous emphasis on the word "doctor." McMitchell looked at him in alarm, unnerved by Jeff's tone.

"What is it, Cash?" he asked. He fumbled for words. "What's wrong on the track, anyway? Can I be of any service to you and Will?"

"More than you'll ever know, doctor," Jeff said harshly. His eyes searched the room. Bill Barber already had come in and was staring suspiciously at him. Logan entered at that moment, saying: "Did you want to see me, Gorman? What's the matter with your second race. You're twenty minutes late. That's no way to run a track."

Jeff glanced sourly at Logan. "I'll

be with you in just a minute." He nodded at Bates.

The Coral Island City police chief advanced on McMitchell and clamped a hand on his shoulder. "You're under arrest, Dr. McMtichell."

McMitchell turned dead white. He looked as if he were about to faint. "I . . . I . . . what do you mean?" he asked. He stared around the suddenly silent room. Jeff cast a quick glance at Logan and Barber. Both, he could see, were mystified. And alarmed. He had expected both reactions.

Chief Bates produced a pair of handcuffs. McMitchell backed away from him, wild eyed. "What's the matter?" he demanded, hysterically. He got a grip on himself and attempted to summon up his dignity. "What's the meaning of this absurd action?" He looked at Jeff, his color returning. "Is this a practical joke?"

"Murder isn't funny," Jeff said. The way he spoke the words was almost as if he had cursed McMitchell. The dentist paled again. He stammered something unintelligible and finally sputtered: "Ridiculous!"

Bates spoke up. "I hereby place you under arrest for the murder of Carson Bishop," he said. Jeff shot him a quick look of appreciation. The Coral Island City chief know how to rise to the proper dramatic heights demanded. "A warrant for your arrest on a charge of first degree murder has been issued in Tamiami and the authorities there have requested me to arrest you on sight."

He snapped the handcuffs on McMitchell's wrist and his own. "Come along, doctor," he said. McMitchell uttered a wild cry and attempted, belatedly to flee. Bates jerked him roughly, snapping, "None of that." McMitchell fainted.

"Get some water somebody," Bates demanded. One of Drake's friends did better; he produced a flask.

Drake grasped Jeff by the arm, the critical situation of the track forgotten. "My God!" he exclaimed. "This is horrible. Are you sure. Isn't there some mistake."

Jeff shook his head. "You and Dallas better get hold of Aine and break the news to her as gently as you can. She doesn't know anything about the crime."

"But how did he do it?" Drake asked.

"With a needle, apparently," Jeff explained. "While poor old Bish was under the oxygen. The pupil of the eye expands. He sent the nurse from the room, as the police reconstruct it, lifted Bishop's eyelid. Inserted and withdrew the needle so quickly that he effected the brain hemorrhage without leaving a trace. The pupil contracted when the effect of the oxygen wore off. Just before he did it he turned off the oxygen so that the contraction of the pupil had already begun. He pretended to the nurse that he thought Bishop was showing signs of heart failure before she left the room and the excuse he got her out on was that she was to phone for an ambulance. By the time she returned, he had disposed of any blood seepage there might have been withdrawing the needle, but it's doubtful if there was any. He did it very expertly with a very fine needle."

Jeff pushed his dazed partner away. "Run along and break the news to Dallas and then both of you see his wife," he ordered again. "I'll tell you more about it later. I don't want to appear callous, but we've a track to keep open here and twenty-nine thousand people are milling around out there wondering what's the matter." Jeff turned on Bar-

ber and Logan. "I wonder if you gentlemen would mind stepping into Mr. Drake's private office with me for a moment. As you may have guessed, a serious situation has arisen with regard to the track and I'd appreciate your advice."

Barber said nothing. His eyes did not twinkle. He removed his hat and followed in Jeff's wake patting the top of his pink, bald head with a silk pocket handkerchief.

"Delighted to give you any advice I can, Gorman," J. Walter Logan said. His voice lacked its customary, well-bred assurance as he added. "Horrible thing about poor Bishop. McMitchell of all people. Can't imgaine . . . must be something wrong—"

Jeff closed the door. "There's been no error. He killed Bishop and you both know it."

Logan flushed a heavy red beneath his dark tan. "That's a lie, Gorman," he said. He shook with rage. "I know nothing whatever of it. Don't make insinuations—"

Barber smiled placidly and broke in: "Calm yourself, Walter," he advised, having recovered his own composure. "Cash is just having his little fun. Put down the cards, Cash."

Jeff didn't smile. "They're all aces and I'm damned mad," he said shortly. "Bishop was one of the finest men I knew. Directly or indirectly you murdered him. The mere fact that you may not have known anything of that murder has nothing to do with the case. You adopted a pious air and didn't permit your right hand to know what your left was doing—and your left hand was Nick Lias, a stupid, sadistic, genealogical throwback to the caveman days. For a mentality he has a low cunning and his best ideas on the smart way to deal with enemies is to beat them up or kill them. He was your man and you can't shed that responsibility like a snake sheds its skin. McMitchell was weak-chinned and trying to live beyond his means. He was heavily in debt to Lias for gambling. Not even you knew how heavily. Lias knew he wasn't going to get the money and with your consent made a deal with McMitchell to act as a pipeline between this track's operators and yourselves. Then he thought up one better, being fearful that Bishop might put this place over with the help of my money. So he wiped out McMitchell's debt entirely and gave him twenty-five thousand dollars to boot to kill Bishop, being afraid himself to knock him off with a gun due to Bishop's prominence. McMitchell will crack and involve Lias. The leaves you boys right in the middle. While not actually accessories, you'll never be able to live this down if you are publicly pilloried for it."

Logan said nothing, but he looked considerably deflated. He was in no fighting mood. He knew what such an exposé would do to his career. Bill Barber rubbed his bald head. "No kidding, Cash, I would never have turned Lias loose if I'd thought the dope would pull a stunt like this. I thought he had some brains—"

"I know you're no murderer, Bill," Jeff replied. "However, all I have to do is open my mouth just once to the press and speak the piece I have just spoken and you're both ruined. It's possible that you would be arrested. Your political friends are going to leave you very quickly, beginning today. They want no part of murder." Jeff's face tensed grimly. "Right this minute, for ten cents, I'd put you on that spot anyway."

Bill Barber rubbed his bald spot again: "What do you want?"

"Get Hasset on the telephone and have him notify Nordoff that the mutuel guarantee is re-posted," Jeff said. "That's item number one."

"How about the rest?" Barber said.

"After the races are running again, I'll talk the rest," Jeff said. "Take it or leave it."

Logan had recovered some of his aplomb. "I deny all these allegations. Ridiculous!" he said. "However, I can see where the public might see this thing in the wrong light. Call Hasset."

Barber opened his hands helplessly. "He's on the plane for New York," he said.

Jeff looked at his watch. "It's three minutes to three," he remarked. "There's the telephone. My assistant, James Ranger, is now sitting in the First State Bank of Tamiami, where you both have accounts. Call the bank and inform them that you both are sending in checks made out to 'Cash'—no pun intended—ask them to stay open and have them deliver the money to Mr. Ranger. He is known at the bank. You can split the guarantee—twenty thousand dollars each or any other arrangement you care to make. You have two minutes and thirty seconds now."

"This is blackmail," Logan protested.

Jeff shrugged. "Murder sounds worse," he said.

Barber reached for the telephone. Logan took out his check book.

"The check's dispatched, Barber said: "Now what?"

Jeff smiled for the first time in thirty minutes. "You gentlemen are both prominent shareholders in Coral Island Park so I would suggest that you tell Mr. Nordoff to let the races begin again . . . the money is on its way. A trifle irregular, I suppose; but I'm sure you can convince him."

Barber stepped to the door. When he returned he looked at Logan. "So he suckered you into buying a piece of this place, too, huh. Looks like we built it."

Logan stared blankly from Jeff to Barber. "I . . . aw, nuts!" he said, which was probably the most undignified remark J. Walter Logan had ever made in his life. "What more did you wish, Mr. Gorman?" he asked. There was resignation in his voice. "Also, what guarantee have we that you won't double-cross us."

"You haven't any," Jeff said. "However, Bill will tell you that you can rely on me in things like this up to a point."

"What point," Barber asked, practically.

"The point where you try to hamstring this park again," Jeff said.

Logan permitted himself a wan smile. "I'm tired of hearing about the place. You have no worries there."

"All right," Jeff said. "You hold a ten percent interest in Coral Island Park. I want half of it back—for one dollar." He ignored Logan's startled protests, turning to Bill Barber. "You have fifteen percent—I'll give you a dollar and a half for half of that. And you're not doing badly at that. You're not losing anything and if you nick the shareholders in your own tracks for enough to pay us a little larger price than we originally estimated you can even make a nice profit on the transaction."

"Sold for a dollar and a half," Barber said. His baby-blue eyes surveyed Jeff coldly. "It's too bad you didn't meet up with a boa constrictor when you were in Brazil."

"I met up with three of them when

I got back," Jeff remarked. "How about it, Logan?"

The Flamingo Park owner nodded briefly. He arose. "That, however, is final. I refuse to make any further concessions," he said. An edge of contempt crept into his voice. "You certainly did capitalize on your very, very dear friend Mr. Bishop's death, didn't you?"

Jeff opened the door for him. "You mind your business and I'll take care of mine," he said. "When you're ready to make your offer for the park, let me know. Now that the place is on a solid basis, our mutual friend Phineas Gardiner, would probably furnish enough capital next year to permit us to present cards that would rival both of you and put us on a paying basis. I think three million would be a nice price."

Barber nodded briefly as he departed. "It's a nice round sum," he said. "I certainly do hate to make you rich, even to save a chestnut husk for myself. I'm not through thinkin' about this."

Jeff smiled, but there was no humor in it. "Don't think too hard or you might land in jail."

JIMMY RANGER roared in as they left. "Here it is, boy—all in nice new U. S. currency. Forty thousand of the best bucks."

Jeff threw his arm around his assistant affectionately. "You did a swell job today, fella. Right in the nick of time with the news about poor old Bish."

Roberta Lane, dressed in something eye-opening in blue, came in, followed by Drake, who looked as if he'd been through a washing machine. "Poor Aine," he said. She's hysterical—we had to send for a doctor. Dallas stayed with her—" His face brightened. "How'd you get the mutuel dough up?"

There was a telephone call for Jeff. He listened briefly, grinned and said: "Congratulations and thanks." He winked at Drake. "Higgins, the Federal attorney," he reported. "Meggs and one of the union men turned State's evidence. Lias is going to be indicted not only under the anti-trust laws, which will ruin his bank roll, but on a charge of grand larceny in connection with the disappearance of funds in the concrete mixers' union."

"Not to mention the fact he'll be up on a murder rap as soon as McMitchell talks," Jimmy Ranger put in.

"That's swell," Drake said, impatiently, "but how did you get up the mutuel money."

Jeff told him. At first he was enthusiastic, then he cooled. Jeff had no difficulty seeing what he was thinking about: it was almost ghoulish to capitalize upon Bishop's death to make the two track owners surrender their stock. Even Jimmy Ranger was eying him oddly. Roberta's face was a study.

"Incidentally," he concluded. "I wish you'd see that that stock is transferred to Mrs. Bishop's ownership when Barber and Logan make it over to me."

Drake jumped up and pumped his hand boyishly. "Say, that's a grand thing to do," he said, smiling enthusiastically. The pendulum of his emotions swung the other way. "But that only leaves you with twenty-five percent of the track," he said. "That hardly seems fair after all you've risked and all you've done to put the track over."

Jeff remained discreetly silent. Drake struck his fist on the desk. "I'm not going to let you get away with that, Cash—I'll transfer five percent of my ownership in the syndicate to you and

we'll both have thirty. Don't protest, now. That's only fair after what you've done."

Old George Mathews stuck his head in the door. "Come on you folks," he yelled. "Haven't you any sporting blood in you. The field in the Inaugural Handicap's going to the post—" He waved his hat at Jeff. "Nice work, boy."

Jeff made his way to his box with Bobbie hanging on his arm and Jimmy Ranger, feeling secure about the matter of eating for the first time in eight days, bringing up the rear.

"I notice you protested against Will Drake cutting you in for five percent of his share in the track," she said, sweetly. "Your outcry was something terrific." She arranged herself a little more comfortably on his arm. "That's like taking candy away from a baby."

"Well, baby wouldn't have any candy if it wasn't for me," Jeff said.

"That's what I like about you, Cash, darling," she said. "You're so modest."

"Don't you think a man's entitled to turn a small profit now and then," he asked.

"How small?" she inquired.

"I'd sell out tomorrow for five hundred thousand dollars," he replied. His smile didn't flash in its customary manner. It just grew.

Jimmy Ranger inspected the tote figures for the current race on the board in the infield. "What's the matter with this business," he demanded. "Five percent of that mutuel window money adds up very nicely to me as a regular diet."

Jeff withdrew a letter from his pocket and flipped it to his assistant. "See what you think of that," he said.

Jimmy looked at the post mark. A groan that could come only from the soul arose in his throat. "What's in La Paz, Bolivia?" he asked.

"A mining engineer I used to know has discovered new tin deposits in the upper reaches of the Amazon," he replied. "They may be very rich—" There was a far-away look in his eyes. "It listens pretty good. There's real money in tin these days."

THE END.

There is a lot more to the milk business than a generous cow at one end and a thirsty consumer at the other; which Thomas Jefferson "Cash" Gorman discovers when his friendly enemy, Phineas T. Gardiner, ropes Cash into taking over some of his milk interests. Cash and his ever-present pal and coworker, Jimmy Ranger, open a chapter of a new adventure by driving headlong into a milk strike, so headlong that they both are deluged with the contents of the "Liquid Gold" from a truck which they smash into. That is only the beginning of things which both Cash and Jimmy are destined to smash into in this gripping account of dealings with the big-town racketeers. Don't miss "Liquid Gold" in February Wizard.

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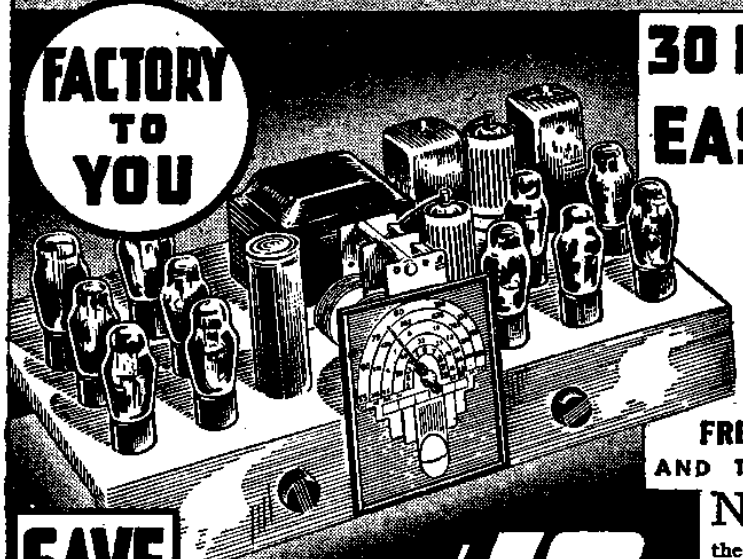

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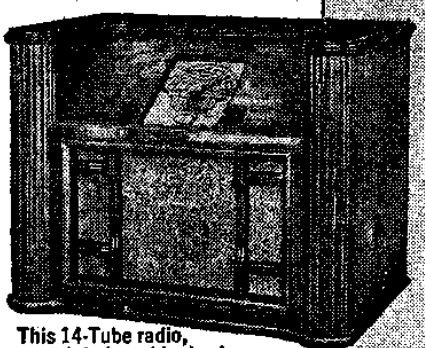

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GET MIDWEST'S ANSWER TO TRADE-INS!

Nags And Scrap Iron

BY JESS CARVER

● Culpepper Twig finds more than cue tips are broken over the green-covered pool tables at Mr. Mooch's.

THE LANGUOROUS town of Cider Creek (population 4,678), somnolent as a marmot with the sleeping sickness, a good month or more after the fireworks had died down, still was chuckling deep within itself over the episode of Culpepper Twig, his goats and Senator Delcimus Flick, erstwhile member of Congress, banker, automobile dealer and to at least 4,676 of the population, a distinct pain in the bustle.

Until the now famous affair of the goats, Culpepper Twig had been a mere decimal point in Cider Creek's equation of life. An angular, unattractive, ap-

parently dopey young man, who had made a scant and precarious living taking on unwary traveling salesmen and untutored miners over the patched pool tables in Dave Mooch's emporium of cue and ball, suddenly had become somebody in Cider Creek. Not only had he got the best of the irascible Senator, thereby making for himself a deadly enemy, but he had amassed a considerable bankroll in the doing, a five-hundred-dollar bankroll, to be exact.

It all had started very innocently. A distant aunt of Culpepper's had passed to her reward, bequeathing to her startled nephew a couple hundred dollars in cash money, two acres of land and twenty buxom, healthy goats. The catch had been that Twig's land had been discovered adjoining "Flickacres," the expansive and be-landscaped estate of Senator Flick, where he raised prize chickens and the dickens with his family, consisting of his wife, Abigail, his daughter, Flora Belle and his mother-in-law, deaf old Grandma Cogley. Upon this miniature estate, Culpepper had parked his goats, opening a goat farm.

Senator Flick's blood pressure and indignation reached new highs. But as Culpepper's property lay just across the city line, the law was unable to come to the Senator's aid, and the meek Mr. Twig refused to become intimidated as the aroused Senator stormed and threatened. There had been only one thing left for the ex-lawmaker to do; buy the goats at Culpepper's price. The latter asked and got, twenty-five dollars each for his animals. Then, with the odiferous animals on his hands, the goats turned in to figurative white elephants. Finally, to his vast relief, a buyer hove into view, offering five dollars per copy for the tin can gobbling pets. Thankful to be rid of the bewhiskered quadrupeds, the Senator had swallowed his loss, only to discover, to his horror, that the purchaser was a cousin of Mr. Twig's.

IT became very apparent, thereafter, that Senator Flick was icily determined to make Culpepper pay, preferably through both the nose and pocketbook, for the sock the innocent Mr. Twig had given the Flick dignity, and bank account, while on Culpepper's part, a new light appeared in his wishy-washy blue, slightly myopic eyes and ambitions seemed to stir, if not exactly move around, within his convex breast.

So Cider Creek sat back to enjoy the show, to await round two of the Flick-Twig embroglio.

"You know, Dave," remarked Culpepper to his pal, Mr. Dave Mooch, one afternoon as the two of them battled over a fifty-ball match, "it's nice to have money."

Mr. Mooch grunted sourly. "You kiddin'?" he asked. "I've known that for a long time."

Culpepper paid little heed to his companion's sardonic rejoinder. "Yes, sir," he mused. "I been figgerin', an' I figger I need more dough that I got. I'm goin' to be somebody in this town, an' it takes dough to do that."

The poolroom proprietor looked at his angular pal curiously. "What's got into you, Cully?" he cracked. "A month ago, you didn't have the price of a short beer. Now you got a few dollars an' you're looking for more. It don't pay, Cully; I'm tellin' you. I got ambitious once and almost landed in the clink. I even tried to beat the hosses once. I was lucky to get away with my pants, much less my shirt."

"That's funny," said Culpepper. "Hosses! You mentioned 'em an' I been thinking about 'em, Dave, how about

you lending me a thousand dollars?"

Mr. Mooch blinked, almost dropping his cue and missing a set-up two-ball combination. "Lend you a thousand bucks!" he gasped. "You talking about hosses and borrowin' a grand all in one breath. Listen, Cully, I like you, see. You're a nice guy to play pool with, an' I don't mind stakin' you to a fiver now an' then, but a thousand dollars! Say, I wouldn't lend my own brother that kind of money."

Culpepper didn't mention it, but he wasn't surprised at Mr. Mooch's reluctance to lend his brother money, seeing as how said brother was even then doing three years on a bum check rap. Instead, he asked: "Would you lend me a thousand if I was to give you fifty percent interest?"

Mr. Mooch turned a look of grave concern on the bland Culpepper. "Are you sure you're feelin' O. K.?" he queried. "You ain't been out in the sun too much? Jeez, Cully, don't you get thinkin' about them hosses, or tryin' to beat 'em. You can't; no one can."

Culpepper arose lazily to his feet. "I ain't askin' for the money to play the hosses with, Dave," he explained. "I got a deal in mind, a deal where I can make myself some real dough. You know the old iron foundry, down by the crick? Well, I figger on buying it."

His friend snorted. "That pile of junk!" he exclaimed. "Now I know there's something loose in your coco. Why, they been tryin' to peddle that joint for five years or more. An' what would you do with it if you could buy it?" He shook his head. "Nope, you're batty, Culpepper; batty as hell."

Mr. Twig smiled dreamily. He tossed a piece of cue chalk high into the air, catching it deftly behind his back as he started away. "O. K., Dave," he said pleasantly. "O. K. I just thought I'd ask you. See you later."

THE iron foundry Culpepper contemplated purchasing had been erected some seven years before by a syndicate of local men, headed, of course, as all things in Cider Creek were headed, by Senator Flick. The Senator was, at the time, in Congress and it was on his promise of swinging some government contracts that the foundry was built. Two or three fair-sized contracts had been awarded, but the voters of the district threw a monkey wrench into the works by failing to return Brother Flick to his seat on Capitol Hill, with the result the foundry was unable to survive the depression and finally was closed down. It had lain idle ever since, and consisted of nothing but a rusty sheet iron building, a few steel beams and girders, two or three tons of pig iron billets and some outmoded machinery.

Culpepper left Mr. Mooch's entertaining presence and strolled down the town's sleepy main street and into the office of his attorney, Counsellor Dickery Snub, the attorney who had represented him in the great goat deal. Having no idea his goonish-appearing client had anything heavier on his mind than the day's baseball results or the correct procedure in making a five-ball combination shot, Counsellor Snub's greeting was icily grumpy. Culpepper's first words, however, brought the lawyer to sudden attention.

"Dickery," drawled Mr. Twig, "do you reckon you could get me one of them options on the old iron works for, say, four hundred dollars?"

Attorney Snub eyed his visitor curiously. He frowned and grunted. "For four hundred dollars I can get you an option on the whole damn town," he

rasped. "What the heck do you want with that junk yard?"

Culpepper smiled his slow smile. "I jus' want to buy it," he declared. "Mebbe I'm goin' into the junk business. You find out about the option and sound the boys out on price."

"Come back in an hour," grunted the attorney. "I'll call the stockholders right now."

What Culpepper didn't know was that Counsellor Snub was one of those stuck with the old foundry. Anxious to salvage as much out of his investment as possible, Dickery employed his most persuasive and honeyed tones in talking to other stockholders. He managed to contact enough to make a majority, and a selling price of five thousand dollars was agreed upon. It also was agreed to give Culpepper a thirty-day option for four hundred dollars.

Within the hour, Culpepper was back. Attorney Snub had the option ready and Mr. Twig blithesomely forked over his four C's. Then the fireworks started.

One of the few stockholders Brother Snub had not been able to reach had been Senator Flick. When that worthy heard about the deal, through the lips of his own attorney, Sebastian Tilt, he bounded against the ceiling. His exasperation and fury knew no bounds. As quickly as his secretary could summon them, the other stockholders were herded into the senator's presence. The latter was beside himself with anger. Bitter were the imprecations called down upon the heads of his fellow business men. They sat, stunned and perplexed at the senator's verbal blitzkreig. Finally, out of breath, his face the color of a shot

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of sloe gin, he regained control of his emotions sufficiently to explain his wrath.

Represenatives of a foreign country, it appeared, were anxious to purchase the old foundry for its scrap iron value, such being the steel situation because of war in Europe. An offer had been made, an offer the senator had been astute enough to boost to twenty thousand dollars. Now, all was spoiled; Culpepper Twig held the whip hand—for at least thirty days.

"Why," wailed the senator, "only last week, two men from Bolgvania were right here in my office, with cash money in their hands. Twenty thousand dollars! Think of it. . . . Twenty thousand dollars!"

Jonas Peters, editor of the Cider Creek *Daily Wallop,* surveyed the irate banker through calculating, suspicious eyes. "How come, senator," he queried abruptly, "you didn't let us in on this deal a'fore this? You wasn't by any chance figuring on dealin' us out, were you?"

Senator Flick became somewhat mollified. As a matter of fact, and the editor had touched a tender spot, Brother Flick had been a layer of plans, and had contemplated buying out his associates, quietly, one by one. He guessed Editor Peters had somehow smoked out his plan, and decided it would be best to drop his truculent attitude.

"Things like this have to be done . . . er . . . quietly," de declared pompously. "Foreign countries don't want anyone to know what they're doing. I was figuring on calling a meeting this very week to put the matter before you gentlemen. Now . . . now it's up the flue."

Counsellor Tilt offered a ray of hope. "After all," he declared brightly, "Culpepper still has to raise the five thousand dollars, an' he's only got thirty days to do it. That kind of money doesn't grow on trees, at least the trees we got around Cider Creek. What we have to do now is to see that he doesn't borrow it here in town. Senator, you can take care of the bank, can't you? And the rest of us, we can see that he doesn't get any help elsewhere."

"That's right," agreed the senator. "Culpepper Twig must *not* raise the money. Gentlemen, I'll leave it up to you to see that he fails."

The meeting broke up forthwith. As the men left the senator's office, Editor Peters turned to Attorney Tilt. "There's something about this thing's got me guessing," he mused. "What I can't figure is: how did Culpepper get wind of the offer in the first place?"

WORD of Culpepper's fast-one-down-the-middle over Senator Flick was circulated, and rapidly, about Cider Creek, to the great enjoyment and concern of the garden variety of citizens. The folks were elated over Mr. Twig's score at the unpopular senator's expense, but were equally worried over his none too brilliant prospects of raising the final five thousand moolas. Many were secretly in favor of aiding and abetting the erstwhile goat farmer, but found themselves handcuffed by the senator's influence in the economics of the town.

Days rolled by, and Culpepper's usual haunts, or haunt, the sun-splashed front of Mr. Mooch's poolroom, knew him not. Daily he took the 11:08 local to the city, returning late in the evening.

Only Dave Mooch had any idea what Mr. Twig did in the city each day, what had caused him to lay out the cash for a commuters' ticket, and to make the tiresome ninety-mile round trip each

day. The horses were running at Shower Downs, and in his mind's eye, Dave could see Culpepper pressed against the fence, his protruding Adam's Apple bobbing in excitement.

Time staggered on, and the confidence of the stockholders grew as the hopes of those sympathetic to Culpepper dimmed. Things appeared decidedly dismal for Mr. Twig. Dad Murphy, proprietor of the Elite Eatery, furnished the best hint as to Culpepper's unhappy status.

"Culpepper's tightenin' his belt," he confided to a group congregated about the bar in Nick Kopotolous' Palace Cafe. He ain't ordered my blue plate special for three weeks now, an' he ain't et nothin' for breakfast but sinkers and coffee. Yep, it looks tough for the lad, plenty tough."

His hearers nodded sadly and dropped figurative tears into their beers.

Culpepper's option was due to come up on a Monday. The Friday before, in the evening, Culpepper sauntered into Mr. Mooch's, his first appearance in several days.

"Glad to see you, Cully," Mr. Mooch greeted. "Plenty of action around tonight. You ought to pick yourself up a few bucks."

Culpepper took down his favorite cue, rubbing its polished surface with a loving hand. "I ain't playin' tonight, Dave," he said. "I just dropped in to tell you tomorrow's my big day. Tomorrow, I get my five thousand an' Monday, I get the iron works."

"You mean you've been beatin' them horses all this time?" Mr. Mooch exclaimed. "That's great. Tell me about it."

Mr. Twig shook his head. "I ain't even made a bet," he announced. "But I been studyin', and dopin' them hosses out. Tomorrow, I got three of 'em running; three I figure can win. Come on back to your office an' I'll give you the dope."

Back in the littered cubbyhole Mr. Mooch called his "office," Culpepper laid a piece of paper on the desk. On it were scrawled the names of three nags, Jerky Joe, Shot O' Rye and Fancy Pants.

It takes less than no time at all for word, good, bad or indifferent, to percolate about a town such as Cider Creek. Dave Mooch told Fats McKim about Culpepper's horses and Fats spread the word around the bar in the Palace Cafe. Someone dropped in at Dad Murphy's for a late hamburger and relayed the tale to Dad, and that worthy, stopping in at the Elks for the regular Friday night stud session, dropped a few mumbled words as he dealt the first round. Jonas Peters sat in the game, and as he backed up a pair of treys, he muttered:

"I still can't figure how Culpepper ever got next to the senator's deal. But if he's figurin' on making five thousand bucks tomorrow, well, we stockholders can sit back an' take it easy. An' I'm damned if I didn't sorta hope he'd make the grade, too."

Butcher Hap Mueller, blandly catching a case king on the last card, put in:

"Dot Culpepper, he iss der lazy vun, but nerve he iss got, ain't it?"

DAVE MOOCH'S poolroom always was well patronized of a Saturday afternoon, but on this particular day a new high was set in attendance. Everyone in Cider Creek who knew anything, knew that Mr. Mooch had access to the racing results. Therefore, the czar of the cue and ball hurried importantly about his jam-jacked quar-

ters, rushing from pop container to cash register, while down the street, Mr. Solly Greenbaum, owner of the Luna Theater, sat disconsolately and puzzled in his ticket booth wondering what had happened to his usual Saturday matinee customers.

As he served his lukewarm pop and racked up balls, Mr. Mooch kept a watchful eye on the clock. "They're goin' to call me after each race Culpepper's got a nag in," he explained. A few minutes afterward, the telephone jangled and Dave scuttled to answer. "Gimme the prices, will yah?" he finally sputtered excitedly. Then he banged down the receiver and charged into the center of the crowd. "Jerky Joe wins!" he shouted. "He won an' he paid twenty-four forty an' eleven-sixty."

A spontaneous cheer rent the smoky, fetid air of the room. Dave stepped over to the large blackboard which hung along one wall, on which he was wont to record the daily baseball results. With a bit of chalk, he went through some lightning calculations, every eye on his stubby fingers. "Hooray," he chortled as he finished his mathematical workout. Cully wins six hunnert an' ten bucks on his win bet an' two hunnert an' ninety on his place. Yowee. . . . If Shot O' Rye comes home on top, he'll be set!"

Shot O' Rye was due to go in the fourth race and when Mr. Mooch's phone tingled the second time, there scarcely was breathing space in the pool parlor. The word of Culpepper's first horse's score had permeated the Saturday afternoon hustle and bustle of Cider Creek, turning it into sort of a Roman Holiday affair.

Dave Mooch, now drenched with perspiration, literally screamed the good news. "Shot O' Rye won!" he yelled exultantly. "Fifteen-eighty to win an' eight-twenty to place." Again he converted his scoreboard into an adding machine, and when his computations disclosed that Mr. Twig had already won six thousand and eight dollars on his original one-hundred-dollar bet, the resultant uproar was terrific.

The figures were there, right enough, and figures are not supposed to lie. In this case, they didn't. Culpepper's six hundred and ten dollars, won on Jerky Joe, bet back on Shot O' Rye at the odds of seven to one, amounted to forty-eight hundred and nineteen bucks, and the two-hundred-and-ninety bet to place brought in an additional eleven hundred and eighty nine, a grand and imposing total of six thousand and eight bright dollars.

"Wait'll ol' Senator Flick hears about this," Mr. Mooch yelped. "He'll turn up his toes."

SUDDENLY his face sagged, and over it spread an expression of lububrious horror. Shocked tension gripped the crowd as they turned to follow Mr. Mooch's stricken gaze. Standing in the doorway, a look of blank unconcern on his homely face, stood Culpepper Twig.

Jiggling his ever-present piece of cue chalk, Culpepper advanced until he stood before Mr. Mooch. "Howdy, folks," he said.

"What in the hell are you doin' in town, Culpepper?" the aghast Dave burst out. "I . . . we . . . thought you'd be at the track, bettin' them nags. How come you're here in Cider Creek?"

Mr. Twig grinned. "I figured maybe I'd jinx them horses if I went near the track today, so I made my bet in a handbook yesterday and insured my bet—twenty cents on the dollar. Sort

of slept in today; just got out of bed. What's happened?"

Mr. Mooch broke the news, both good and bad. "We figured you was all set, Cully," he moaned. "We figured you wouldn't have to bet that Fancy Pants thing, that you'd have enough won to close your deal. But if you bet in a book, you can't call off your parlay now, and if Fancy Pants runs out of the money, you're sunk."

Culpepper sighed. "Yep," he agreed calmly. "It sort of looks that way now, don't it?"

The gloom that settled over old Mudville on the occasion of the mighty Casey whiffing the breeze was nothing as compared to the gloom that draped itself about the Mooch pool emporium. When the telephone bell announced the result of the last race, the race in which Fancy Pants was carrying the hopes of Culpepper Twig for financial affluence, not a whisper disturbed the pregnant silence. Mr. Mooch walked with laggard steps to the instrument, gingerly picking up the receiver. Culpepper stood by the cigar counter, sipping on a bottle of purple pop. But his eyes were fastened on Mr. Mooch's dismal countenance, a countenance which grew even more dismal as the news of the race hummed over the wires.

Culpepper took one look and knew all was lost. Slowly he set down his half-empty bottle, turned and started bravely from the room. The crowd opened automatically and sympathetically to clear his path.

But Mr. Mooch's face suddenly lighted, and he dropped the receiver and hurried after the retreating Mr. Twig. "Hey, Cully!" he shouted. "Come on back. Everything's jake. Fancy Pants was a late scratch."

They broke out the red fire in Cider Creek that night. Culpepper had two helpings of the blue plate special at Dad Murphy's, topping off his meal with cherry pie a la mode. Citizens who were in debt or otherwise under the thumb of Senator Flick risked catastrophe by openly slapping the happy Culpepper on the back. Dickey Snub high-hatted his colleague, Sebastian Tilt, as they met in the bar of the Elks Club and in the privacy of his office, Senator Flick savagely kicked his brass spittoon from one side of the room to the other.

There were more fireworks on Monday, after Culpepper stuffed the deed to the old foundry into his rear pants pocket. Later, parading triumphantly down the street, he passed the *Daily Wallop* office, and from its portals, stepped Editor Peters. He followed the procession to Mr. Mooch's place of business, where Culpepper had a date to take on the faithful Dave in a game of fifty-ball.

"Tell me one thing, Culpepper," said Editor Peters. "How in the hell did you get wind of this deal in the first place?"

Culpepper grinned. "Well, I'll tell you, Jonas," he replied. "The day those big shots came to town to see the senator, their chauffeur got tired waitin' for 'em and dropped into Dave's place an' got me into a little game. We got to talkin' and he mentioned how come his bosses were in town. Seems like he heard 'em talkin' on the way out here."

Editor Peters gasped. "An' they preach agin' pool playin'," he muttered.

Culpepper turned to fix the local Horace Greeley with a wink. "Funny thing, Jonas," he concluded. "That chauffeur was plenty tough, too. He darn near beat me."

THE END.

COPPER SCENT

BY ARTHUR MANN

● Joe Feder, Ace Promotions, crashes a bridge before he comes to it, with only temporary success.

IT SEEMED as though the glowing future of Ace Promotions, Inc., clouded with each despairing stride of its floor-pacing president, Joe Feder, who was about to be cornered by one more vicissitude of a hectic economic life. His thin, swarthy face, punctuated with shoe-button eyes, was a mask of rising desperation that heightened with each

round trip of the little reception room which now looked like the scene of a successful smoke-screening operation as Feder's ever-present cigar oxidated at full blast from a forced draft.

"A brush-off!" he exclaimed, and slapped the desk at which a carefully-groomed young lady functioned as secretary, receptionist, telephonist and typist. She looked up. Feder continued: "A brush-off by your own brother. A million-dollar deal jee-operdized by a tight-fisted son of prudence juris who hasn't got the imagination of a tapeworm—"

Feder slapped the desk again, but harder.

"Call *all* the courts!" he ordered. "We *got* to find him. I got only *three* hours to set up a demonstration room in a hotel. Get him!"

THE young lady shrugged. "He just can't be reached, Mr. Feder," she sighed wearily. "Besides, we're over our call allotment of the week already. You know what your brother said about useless phone calls—"

"Hooey!" Feder shouted in great disgust. "A fine thing—a president of a company who can't make phone calls. He's the treasurer, an' he knew I had to have a check this morning for this deal. O. K.! Don't call him. Forget him. I'll show him. Call the Hotel Wysteria. Reserve a two-room suite in my name—for a sale demonstration—"

"The Wysteria!" she gasped, and stopped chewing her gum. "A suite there will cost—"

"I know what it'll cost!" Feder assured her with unmistakable emphasis. He tossed a coin to the desk. "An'

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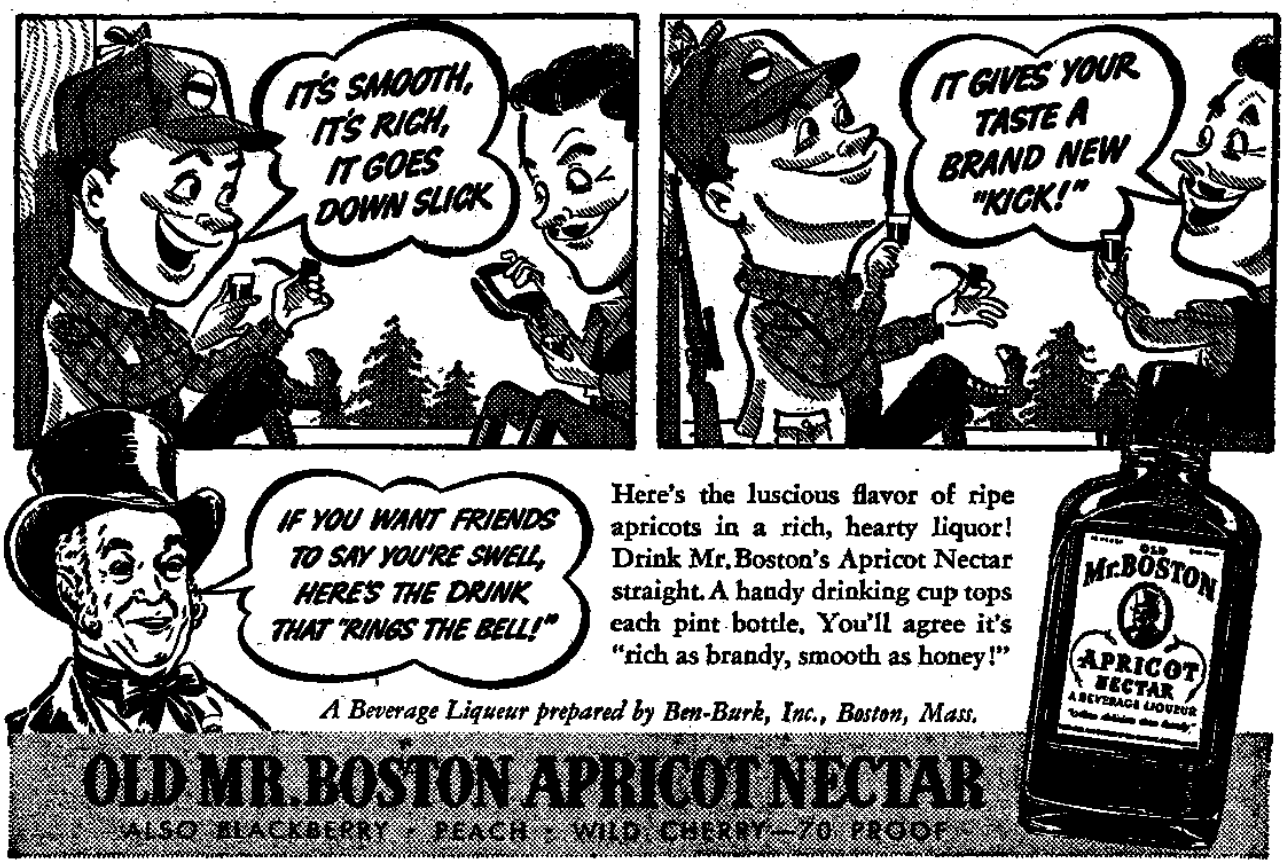
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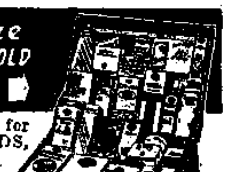

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there's a nickel from the president to pay for the call!"

He strode quickly to the door of a small cubicle marked "Conference Room," and beckoned to a figure in the corner.

"Mr. Bik," he called. "Come on. We got to hurry."

Yon Bik, a newly discovered genius, reacted quickly and joined Joe Feder. He was a youngish man of quick, decisive movements, and his face was one that fronted for unmistakable intellect. His lips were thin and firm, and his eyes, wide and blue, stared defiantly at a skeptical world beneath a high, wide brow.

"You get the money, eh?" Yon Bik asked.

"We'll do O. K.," Feder parried. "We got to hurry. Can you set up your demonstration in an hour?"

"An hour?" Bik gasped. "You said the appointment—it is for three o'clock. Now it is noon—"

"I asked you a question," Feder said, showing him to the door. "Can you set up that demonstration in an hour?"

"If I have to—"

"Mr. Feder," the girl called. "The Wysteria Hotel has reserved your suite—thirty dollars a day!"

"O. K.!" Joe called. "Tell my pinch-penny brother I won't need him—or any of his dough!"

The indignant president of Ace Promotions hastened from the building with Yon Bik trailing close. They crossed Sixth Avenue against a stream of menacing traffic, and turned into "Pitman's—Serves You Right," and known in all cities from coast to coast.

"I am not too hongry—" Yon Bik protested.

"Neither am I," Feder replied. "But we got a big day ahead, an' this is part of the success—I hope. Sit here." He called to a waitress. "Hey, Blondie,

get me some of your lamb stew—two orders, an' hot muffins, an' hurry, because we're in one!"

YON BIK marveled at the directness of this amazing young man; marveled at his penchant for lightning decisions involving far-seeing plans. But most of all he admired Joe Feder's ability to understand the complexities of a chemist's ideals and purposes. For who else would believe that Yon Bik had discovered the most priceless need of metallurgy—the lost secret of hardening copper? The answer, take it from Yon Bik, was "no one." He had tried to enlist belief everywhere and had been ridiculed until he thought he'd take leave of his senses. Hunger had added to his woe.

But Joe Feder, always in search of genius in behalf of Ace Promotions, was a beacon of hope. It puzzled Yon even now to think that he should come from distant Yugoslavia to find Joe Feder after so many years in America, or vice versa.

"Why not?" Feder had laughed. "You dreamed on the shore of that Adriatic Sea, an' I dream about a genius like you over here. We're drawn together by what you call chemical divinity."

Whatever it was, Yon Bik was thankful for this opportunity to prove to a skeptical world that copper could be hardened without adding any other metal. It wasn't easy, of course; nor was it simple. But he had done it, and, like all difficult metamorphosis of chemistry, mankind and mass production would simplify things and make production cost low enough for general usage.

He toyed with the lamb stew and the hot muffins, too excited to eat. He could think only of the surprise on the faces of the Condor Copper executives when he hardened their own copper before their eyes; when he showed them how they could be independent of Dutch tin, so necessary to make copper practical in the form of bronze, so expensive and so monopolized. He would show them that copper would eventually supplant steel, and without any metal added for hardening. It would be pure, untarnished, lasting—

He leaped from his chair as a howl of pain and protest pierced his eardrums. Nearby diners gasped in horror, upset lunches and chairs as the howling increased and reached the far corners of the busy restaurant. In fact, a frightening pandemonium seized the immediate area as Joe Feder, his hands clasped to his mouth, accompanied his screams of pain with gesticulations of unmistakable agony. Yon Bik rushed to his sponsor's side, seized by an understandable mixture of sympathy and fear that fate had again intercepted his path to success.

"What is it, Feder?" he shouted. "What . . . what?"

"Oh—" was Feder's only reply, save for repetitious groans, and wails of agony. He whirled, and rolled his head, rolled his eyes and would have rolled on the floor, had there been room.

Diners crowded to his side, curious, sympathetic, and in growing numbers. The waitress, ghostly pale, stood at the fringe of the human circle, frightened by the thought that she might have poisoned a customer, and ought to leave without collecting her pay. Before she could make her decision, the manager hastened to the hectic scene, grabbed her by the wrist and pushed a path through the milling circle.

"What is it?" he shouted to Joe Feder. "Stop the caterwauling, an' tell

us what happened. Do you want a doctor? . . . What. . . . Stop, for *heaven's sake!!!*"

"Oh . . . Oh!" screamed the president of Ace Promotions. "My mouth . . . oh, my teeth . . . oh . . . oh. . . ."

The Feder eyes ceased rolling, and the tousled head ceased its circumferential activity. He pulled his hands away from his open mouth and pointed to the cavity which contained a piece of lamb bone.

"Just a bone!" the manager said haughtily, and with a suggestion of optimism. "Just a bit of bone!"

But he reckoned without the astute Joe Feder, who never did things half way. As hundreds of awe-stricken diners watched, he removed the remnants of a shattered dental bridge. It emerged with the lamb bone in such a way as to leave no possible room for doubt or dispute in the event that the incident reached the supreme court of the state, as such cases often do, especially when the "victim" is not handled with kid gloves. Any manager in the "Pitman's—Serves You Right" and from coast to coast, knew this. Any manager wants to work up to a divisional director, vice-presidency and perhaps to the post of commissary purchaser where the money flows in such a stream that bonuses for careful buying, etc.

"Come back to the rest room, my poor man!" the manager soothed. "Just a trifle. Go back to enjoying your lunch, everybody!" he called. "This way, please, sir."

"Oh . . . my jaw!" Feder wailed. "The whole jawbone is cracked . . . get me an ambulance. I can't stand the pain—an' my best bridge, too!"

He followed the manager to the rear of the restaurant. Yon Bik, too startled to think, followed. Out of hearing from the diners, and witnesses, the manager took the situation in hand.

"O. K., wise guy!" he muttered. "What's your bridge worth?"

"Two hundred—"

"An' you'll take seventy-five to sign a release against all claim? Right?" He picked up a telephone.

Joe Feder nodded with an attempt at reluctance.

"I couldn't get it duplicated for that," he confessed, "but if it's done now—"

That statement was all the manager needed. He telephoned the office, talked with the claim department, and received authority to pay in cash.

TWO minutes later Joe Feder counted the money, and signed a paper releasing "Pitman's—Serves You Right" from any and all further responsibility for the Feder jaw and dental embellishments. With Yon Bik in tow, he hastened from the restaurant. Out on Forty-second Street he was his old, aggressive self.

"O. K., Yon," he exclaimed. "Here's five bucks. Take a cab and have the driver help you bring down your equipment. I'll go to the Wysteria and set up everything else in the suite. Don't forget anything, and be careful of that vacuum pump. You wanted your chance. Well, here it is, an' if you fail, I'll plant my fist right in your educated face. O. K.?"

Yon Bik smiled. "As you say, Feder . . . hokay!"

Among the many things that Joe Feder did not know was the romantic history of copper, and how the various civilizations virtually began with the use of the metal as a first step upward; that it was employed in utility and art by the Fourth Dynasty of Egypt more than

6,000 years ago; that it was so used in Asia Minor 5,000 years ago, and in China 500 years later; that it was an important part of the Mycenaean, Phoenician, Babylonian and Assyrian civilizations.

Joe Feder not only didn't know this but he didn't give a hoot. From Yon Bik's erudite explanation of the 6,000-year struggle of mankind with copper, he had thrilled to one very vital point: no one had ever come across pure copper in anything but a ductile state. Always it had to be mixed with another metal to impart rigidity, with the result that copper and tin became bronze; copper and zinc became brass; copper, zinc and nickel became German silver; copper and sixty or seventy percent nickel became monel metal; copper with manganese could stand punishment of heat and pressure.

But copper alone could be used only when protected against pressure and abrasion, and for more than 6,000 years mankind had searched for a way to render the great and mysterious metal as strong or stronger than steel. Joe Feder's astute brain was quick to see that the man who had this secret was worth a million, yes, a billion, to the world.

He lost no time in trying to make the world pay this figure, from which he planned to extract a reasonable profit. Buttressed by a nest egg, he would build a promotional empire on the genius of Yon Bik, because, if a man could come up with the secret of hardening copper, he must have a batch of other negotiable secrets. Even if he happened to have no other at the moment, it would take such a brain no time to discover other vital needs of the world—such as . . . well, Feder couldn't think of any offhand. The big point was that Yon Bik was a billion-dollar

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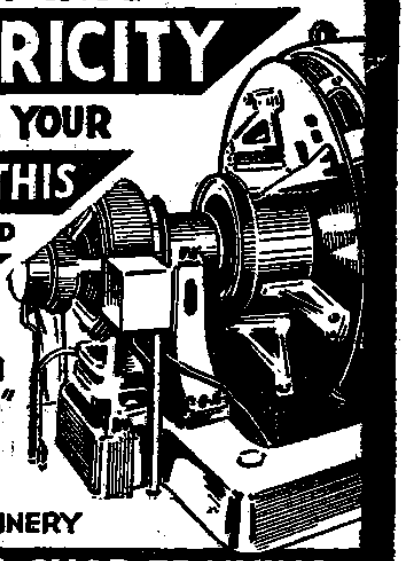

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proposition, and well worth shattering a dental bridge for. Joe Feder would have pulverized every tooth in his head, rather than miss out on this golden—or copper—opportunity.

BUSTLING in and about the two-room suite at the exclusive Wysteria Hotel, the president of Ace Promotions was busy as a bride and perhaps as happy as one. He whistled, keeping in close harmony with his rising spirits. He forgot his parsimonious, penny-pinching, purse-pulling brother who, as ultra-conservative treasurer of Ace Promotions, as well as financial backer, had expressed no confidence in the copper-hardening project by denying him the price of a hotel suite for a public test.

Now all was ready, or would be when Yon Bik arrived. Mr. Clyde Perrin, president of Condor Copper, would be impressed by the swank of the demonstration, as well as the success of Yon Bik's process. You couldn't laugh off the silk drapes, gold-leaf furniture, pier-glasses, candelabra, to say nothing of more bathroom towels than a person could get dirty in a week of Saturday nights.

And, if this Clyde Perrin was too skeptical, or tried to push them around on price, Joe Feder resolved to do a little pushing in the direction of the guy's face. As he speculated on the possible difference between his million-dollar demand and Perrin's offer—which would probably be a pittance—he developed a distinct dislike for the man. The more he measured that difference, the higher his rage soared, and presently he began to call the absent executive names.

"The heel!" he muttered aloud, and shifted the demonstration table to a spot near an electric outlet. "I'm a good mind to call the whole deal off, an' hunt up another copper company. Why,

the Guggenheims'll pay ten times as much. Condor's probably a cheap outfit anyway—"

THE telephone bell rang, and, with the phoneward dash, Feder forgot his feud with Clyde Perrin. After all, it might be Perrin himself on the wire calling off the whole deal. But it wasn't Perrin. It was Yon Bik. He was in trouble, serious trouble concerning the all-important vacuum system.

"I told you to be careful with the pump!" Feder screamed.

But it wasn't the pump. It was the glass dome in which the demonstration took place. The chemical change occurred in a vacuum beyond reach of natural air and resultant oxides from the absorption of monoxide, hydrogen, sulphur-dioxide and whatever else the air might contain. The great glass dome had been smashed.

"I think maybe it's fifth columnists," Yon explained simply.

"I don't care if it's termites!" Joe Feder shouted. "Get out an' dig up another glass dome for your vacuum pump. I told you to watch that vacuum system. Get it down here with your chemicals, an' hurry!"

"As you say, Feder, hokay," the chemist replied hopefully. "I . . . I didn't want to tell you before, Feder, but several countries will like to see me dead, rather than see my copper secret conveyed to another country. The political situation of Yugoslavia—"

"Forget politics!" Feder screamed, his swarthy face blanching from the strain of the moment. "Get that junk down here before I come up an' send a piece of you to every country in Europe, includin' the Scandihavian. Step on it!"

"No," Bik replied. "It was knocked off my table."

"What?"

"The glass dome. Maybe somebody stepped on the pieces—"

"O. K., Yon," Feder murmured wearily. "I understand. So hurry!"

He slammed the instrument down and began to pace the floor. He was suddenly struck with the thought that Yon Bik's secret *might* be wanted by other countries. *Might* be! he reflected. Any government would be a sap *not* to want it. Supposing they stole the formula—

Joe Feder slumped to a nearby overstuffed chair to keep from fainting. The formula should be put in a safe somewhere, out of everybody's reach. Why, a promotional empire hung on that formula, and a valuable piece of bridgework had been sacrificed—

It was the phone again, announcing the arrival of Mr. Clyde Perrin, and party. They were on the way up!

Joe Feder now felt like a bride with the roast ruined. How was he to explain the absence of all signs of a copper-hardening demonstration? Suppose they got impatient, or disgusted, and called it off!

My Clyde Perrin was at the door before Feder could answer the supposition. He was a smooth-looking man, well-dressed, well-pressed. He took Joe Feder's extended hand, and introduced his "party," a man and a woman, of middle age, and tight-lipped, skeptical faces.

"Meet Mr. Phocian Strait and Mrs. Strait," Perrin introduced, and went on as Feder greeted them with rising apprehension. "Mr. and Mrs. Strait are the principal stockholders of Condor Copper. I felt that they should be included—"

"We insisted upon coming," said

Phocian Strait in a sharp voice.

"This thing can't be done," Mrs. Strait added. "My grandfather was one of the first in United States copper. He'd have done it, if it could be done. Where's your chemist, Mr. Feder?"

"He's . . . he's on his way," Feder stammered, and began to sweat. He's a Dalmation."

"A Dalmation is a dog," Phocian Strait said and his lips tightened.

"Yes, his wife added, "the spotted kind that follows coaches and lies around fire-engine companies."

"Mr. Feder is correct," Perrin explained. "His chemist comes from Dalmatia, which is in Yugoslavia, on the eastern shore of the Adriatic Sea. And he's a very remarkable chemist."

"He must be," Phocian Strait murmured, "if he can harden copper."

"He'll harden the copper!" Joe Feder exclaimed angrily. "But what I want to know is whether your vulture company—"

"Condor Company," Perrin corrected.

"Vultures, eagles, condors—it makes no difference!" Feder continued. "Have you birds got a million bucks to pay for this?"

"We'll tell you when we see it done," said Mrs. Strait with a sniff.

WITH that the three visitors fell to silence and sought chairs. And it was a painful silence at first, broken only by Joe Feder's attempts at conversation. But they were not interested in whether the Brooklyn Dodgers won or lost the pennant; nor did they care whether New York State was prospering more through the introduction of mutuel betting at the race tracks. They were dopes, he decided, when all three disclaimed any interest in or knowledge of whether Joe Gans could have licked Henry Armstrong in a fifteen-round fight.

The minutes grew heavier as they mounted to the number of thirty, and Joe Feder knew a new type of agony when they comprised a full hour of waiting. Perrin's frequent glances at his watch, accompanied by sighs, made the ordeal even worse. Feder was ready to give them the heave-o when the crescendo roar of an approaching police car brought all four to the hotel window. An instant later the president of Ace Promotions went into a hornpipe of delight.

"He has arrived, gentlemen," he shouted. "And lady!"

"That's the police," Mrs. Strait said.

"And the little fellow there, carrying that big glass—that's the world's greatest genius, Yon Bik," Feder added. "The two cops have the rest of his equipment . . . the bellhop is helpin'. Gentlemen, and lady, this will be the crowning day of your many on earth."

They looked at him in acute disgust, but the facial skepticism could not dampen the spirits of Joe Feder. Soon they would see a miracle before their eyes; a sight for which mankind had searched in vain through the ages. And Ace Promotions had found it!

And Yon Bik had almost lost it! Nervous, frightened and actually quaking, he rushed to Joe Feder with the glass dome, a heavy affair which fitted to a machine for the extraction of air.

"It is worse than I imagined, Feder!" he whispered. "Somebody took a wild shot at me . . . or at the glass. An automobile bumped into my taxicab twice. I drove to the police station, and had the policemen bring me here. I . . . . I don't know whether we should go through with it."

He glanced about the room. The

police and bellhop were placing the pumping machine and an assortment of peculiar bottles in the room.

"O. K., Mr. Bik?" a patrolman asked.

Bik nodded. "I . . . I guess so. Thank you . . . thanks." They saluted and left. He turned to Feder. "There is a man in this town . . . Stenheim is his name. I am sure I saw him near my place yesterday. I know he does work for foreign governments. When my special glass dome was smashed—"

"Where'd you get this one?" Clyde Perrin asked.

"Right where he had the other made!" Feder replied. "An' don't ask too many questions, Mr. Perrin." He turned to the chemist. "Get a hustle on, Yon. These people are impatient."

Yon nodded. He asked the bellhop to place the items on the table, a four-foot affair with a strong metal top. The cord of the electric pump was attached to a wall socket and found to be working. Yon Bik fitted the large dome snugly at the side and tested the vacuum pump again. It was perfect, and Yon expressed confidence in the outcome.

"Have you actually hardened copper?" Perrin asked.

"Yes, sir," the chemist replied.

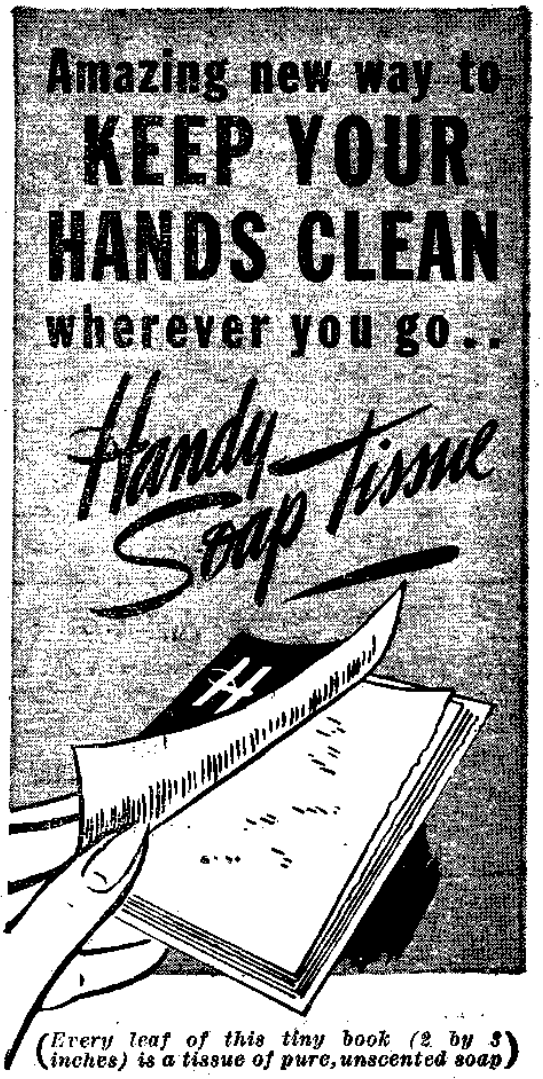
"You're a liar!" Procian Strait exclaimed. "It cannot be done!"

"I'll pop you right in that sour puss!" shouted Joe Feder and brandished an itching fist. "Now pipe down everybody!"

"I have faced a world of skeptics," Yon Bik said with a wry smile. His blue eyes widened as he continued. "I can understand your doubt, and I ask only that you believe what you see. Somebody else does, so much so that twice today they have tried to take my life. They have tried to steal my formula—"

"You have copyrighted this formula, of course?" Perrin interrupted.

"No one in the world knows this



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formula but me!" Yon Bik said proudly. "And nobody can steal it."

"Just remember that, boys," Joe Feder laughed. "Go ahead, Yon!"

"When I die, the formula goes with me," Yon continued. "Nobody can discover it, because the principle is contrary to most of the chemical laws. It takes a skilled chemist to understand certain steps in my formula, and no skilled chemist would violate ordinary chemical laws, which he would have to do to discover what I have obtained."

"Then, how did you discover it?" Phocian Strait sneered.

"As in the case of many important inventions—by accident," Bik laughed. "I spilled something." He turned to the table. "The enemy of copper chemistry is ordinary air and its varied contents. As you know, the molten copper, with a low melting point of one thousand degrees, absorbs gases so fast that manipulation, yes, experimentation is almost impossible."

"An' Yon does it with no air at-tall," Joe Feder finished. "Right in that vacuum."

"Understandable," Clyde Perrin said. "Now, what about the change—does it affect the conductivity?"

"Less than one percent," the chemist replied quickly. "Pure copper tests ninety-six and four-tenths, based on silver's one hundred. My piece of hardened copper tested higher than ninety-five and a half, and at thirteen degrees centigrade it showed an ohm resistance consistent with pure copper. That I have done, gentlemen, and that I can do—"

"Look out!"

Joe Feder dived at the table, and grabbed the large vacuum glass. Yon Bik had turned quickly and was now on the floor, propping a leg of the table.

"Got it, Yon?" Feder asked anxiously.

The chemist peered out from beneath the corner of the table. "Who put up this table?" he asked.

"The bellhop . . . one of 'em. Why?"

"These legs are detachable. This one's unscrewed."

Now it was Joe Feder's turn to worry, and he did an excellent job of it. He stared with deepest suspicion at the three visitors, who stared back at him, not with suspicion, but with acute disgust. They still did not believe that the affair was anything but a hoax. After adjusting the rickety leg and testing the others, Yon Bik rose. His face was very pale now, and he spoke with difficulty.

"That is one more strange accident," he murmured. "I had better get on with the demonstration before something else happens. Did you bring a small piece of your Condor copper?" he inquired.

ALL three skeptics produced a glistening bit of metal. Yon Bik examined them, scratched them, rubbed them and poured acid on each. He discarded Perrin's.

"That is an alloy," he said, smiling. "These are pure. I'll place one piece in the receptacle under the glass dome, directly below this slot at the top. In the open slot I place this glass-lined container of my own acid, the most powerful ever developed. I start the vacuum pump."

He turned the switch and the pump began to extract the air from the dome. The three Condor Company executives drew close, losing a bit of faith in their belief that it was impossible. After all, no one in metallurgy had ever progressed far enough to stage a hoax. If this could be—

"Within that vacuum," Yon Bik went on, pointing to the globe, "the acid coats the metal, and the change occurs un-

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hampered by destructive gases—oxygen, nitrogen, hydrogen, sulphur—especially sulphur. That is most important, and I am sure that large-scale hardening in a gigantic vacuum tank is economically feasible."

Perrin and the two Condor stockholders were close to the machine, drawn by the chance of success and their hope that it would. All eyes were on the big globe as the pumping motion grew slower and slower, until it threatened to give up.

"When the vacuum is complete," Yon Bik said, placing his hand to the top of the glass, "I release the acid, which pours into the receptacle. It is almost air-free now. See, the machine will presently stop—"

As his hand pressed, the glass seemed to explode in a thousand pieces and with the noise of an exploding gun. Yon Bik cried out in horror, and dropped his hand from the acid container. Perrin pulled the two Condor stockholders away, and Joe Feder dashed for the door.

"The glass must have collapsed under outside pressure!" Bik exclaimed. "Stand back—watch out for that acid—"

Joe Feder returned after a momentary glimpse up and down the hall. He pushed Yon from the table, and motioned the others to chairs.

"Gentlemen, that globe was shot with a gun through the transom!" he said.

Yon was out of his chair in an instant, and returned to the table.

"Milk!" he exclaimed. "Get me some milk!"

Perrin and the Straits leaped from their seats and stared in amazement at an unexpected phenomena. The acid was burrowing through the metal top of the table with the devastating effect of a locust swarm.

"This is terrible!" Yon Bik wailed. "Where's the milk?"

"What's in that acid?" Perrin demanded. "What's in it?"

"Wouldn't *you* like to know!" Joe Feder roared. "That's the secret of the ages." He went to the door to wait for the milk.

"I . . . we'll buy that acid!" Perrin shouted. "It's like a flame. We'll buy it . . . buy the formula!"

"Over my dead body!" Joe Feder called. "Here comes the milk!"

"How much will you pay?" the chemist asked.

"Shut up, Yon!" Feder ordered. "Here boy, gimme that milk . . . quick!"

"I have a check here for five thousand," Perrin shouted excitedly. "It was for an option on your process—"

"Is it certified?" Feder asked.

"No," the bellhop replied. "It's grade A, but I'll get you a bottle of certified, if you wish, sir."

"Wise guy!" Feder muttered, and pushed the bellhop headlong to the floor of the hall. He slammed the door. "Here's the milk. Perrin, is that check certified?"

The acid had begun to drip through to the floor now and was burrowing into the high pile of the rug with great speed. Yon Bik removed the cap, dashed some of the milk into the rug, and more on to the table. The acid turned a smoky color, then brown and then resolved itself into coagulated lumps of harmlessness.

"What'd you do, Yon?" Feder asked. "I thought you was hungry."

"The base killed the acid," Yon replied with a sigh of relief. He drained the remaining drops as a precaution, and began to pick up the pieces of glass.

Suddenly he said, "I'll take the five thousand for the acid formula!"

"Yon!" Feder wailed in dismay. "You can't do this to me!"

"He's done it!" Perrin exclaimed, and produced the check. "It happens to be certified, Mr. Bik. Of course, you understand we want to use the acid for cutting metals and surface reduction by immersion."

"You can drink it!" Feder challenged. "You're a crook—"

"Please, Feder," Yon pleaded. "We need the money. They know that."

JOE FEDER shed a tear as Yon Bik jotted down the formula for the acid; or maybe it was a bead or two of perspiration. Consolation was the fact that Ace Promotions had money where they had none before, even though the copper-hardening formula was not a million-dollar proposition. This was one of the few silent periods in Feder's life as he watched Clyde Perrin and the majority stockholders of Condor Copper depart. With the door and transom closed, Yon Bik smiled, and handed the check to Feder.

"Don't worry," he comforted. "They cannot harden copper. They have just bought a powerful acid which, in a vacuum readjusts the molecular structure of copper, but doesn't harden it."

"No?" Joe gasped. "What does?"

"Ordinary table salt," the chemist whispered, "used in a second step. But they don't know how, and they cannot figure it out chemically. Neither can the man who shot through the transom. So, I thought I'd just sell the acid formula, so we'd have a little pocket money for something else. Would you like to see some artificial copper?"

"No, thanks," Feder said. "If you'll excuse me, I'm goin' to a dentist so I can eat tonight!"

THE END.

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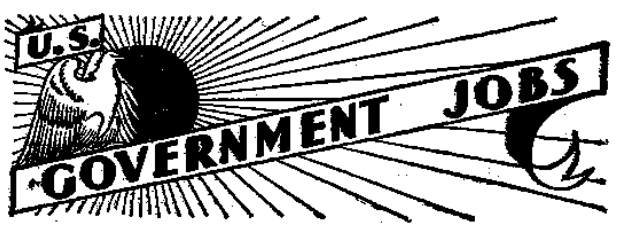

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